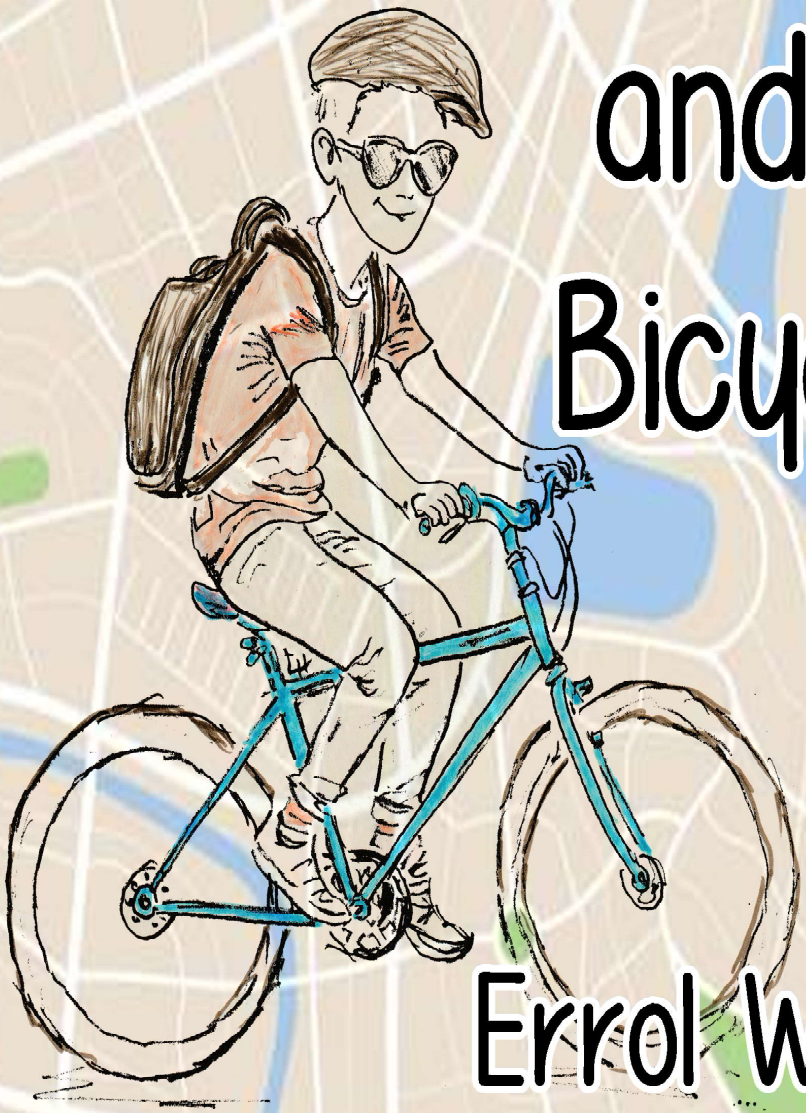
A Boy, a Book and a Bicycle



Errol Wright

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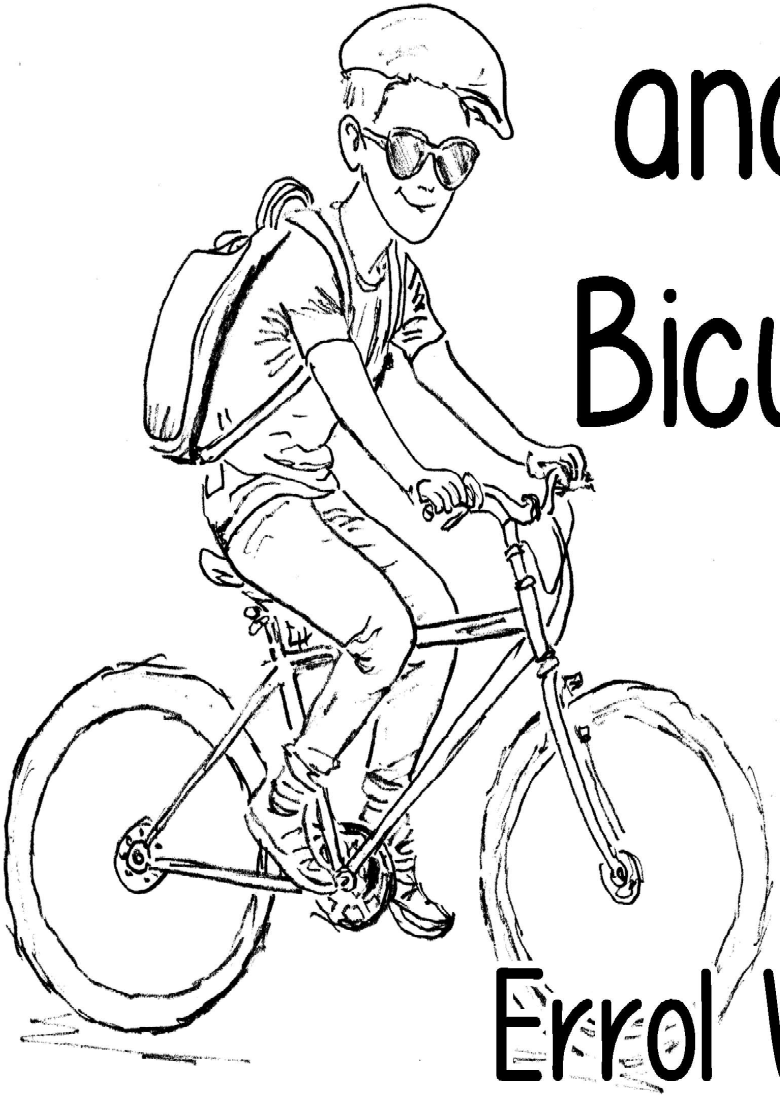

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A Boy, a Book and a Bicycle
Errol Wright
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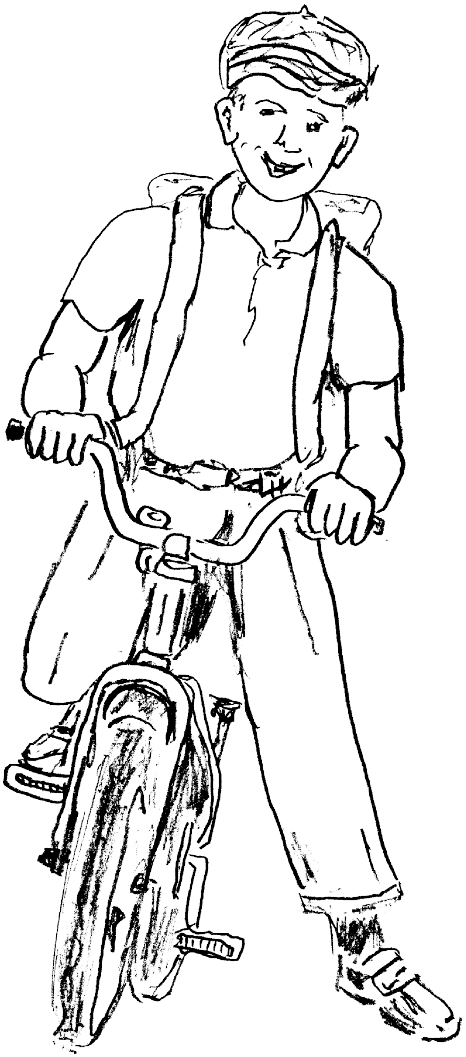

INTRODUCTION

Most eighteen-year-old youth are at the crossroads of life's journey. Some are still boys, other's are maturing, while many are men. Their up-bringing and education determine at what stage they are at.

This book is about one youth who had a sketchy education, mostly home schooled.

He had an unsettled up-bringing due to his parents moving from place to place.

When he was age 16, his parents were preparing to divorce which was very unsettling for him.

Errol's early teen years were lived out in a small country town with limited opportunities or career choices.

Circumstances forced him to seek an escape route in the form of Avondale College. As one door closed, he hoped another would open.

After one year at Avondale, his sheltered life came to an end when a door opened into the world.

The year 1951 was Errol's introduction to "Making it on his own."

CHAPTER ONE

*"All who have chosen God's service are to rest in his care. Christ pointed to the birds flying in the heavens, to the flowers of the field, and bade His hearers consider these objects of God's creation" DA p313.**

It began with a simple arrangement. The Publishing Department Secretary would meet me on the steps of the YMCA at 6am. After a tiring train journey from North New South Wales, I was looking forward to enjoying a quiet night in a soft bed away from the noisy, city streets of Melbourne.

After struggling over the Flinders Street Bridge with my large suitcase, canvasser's bag and navy-blue overcoat, I arrived at the YMCA. The desk clerk was preoccupied but eventually lifted his head to look at me over his metal-rimmed glasses. There were no beds he informed me. The Australian Navy had booked out the entire house. He was surprised I didn't know that it

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** DA = Ellen G White, The Desire of Ages, Pacific Press Publishing Company, 1898*

was the Melbourne Show week.

He seemed to enjoy telling me that all accommodation throughout the city and suburbs was taken. So here I was, all alone in a strange city with nowhere to stay for the night. I had heard about people who slept on park benches or in bus shelters but the idea scared me to death. One thing was certain, I had to find a place to park my bags. No, I couldn't leave them at the YMCA. I was told to try the train station.

So, it was back over the bridge and into the huge, un-inviting mouth of the Flinders Street Railway Station. After I had checked my bags, I got a flash of inspiration. Why not ride the train back and forth for the night? I bought a ticket to Box Hill. I hoped it was a long way away. The seats weren't all that comfortable but I was soon fast asleep.

My dreams were shattered by a foreign voice shouting something about Box Hill being a terminal. I didn't understand the accent but I soon got the picture. The face that was glaring at me through the carriage window, made my situation very clear. There was more bad news. The next train would arrive in the city at 7am. I discovered that the only way back to the city was to walk to Mont Albert where an all night tram

would convey me back to the city centre.

I was sure glad of my overcoat, a garment that would get a lot of work over the next ten months. That night it would protect me from the clammy, darkness I could almost feel. As I headed off in what I hoped was the direction of the tram station, I couldn't help wondering how I was in such a dismal situation. I should have been back in college, not wandering the lonely streets of Melbourne. My reverie was regularly interrupted by wild, savage barking by hairy monsters trying to break down the fence that thankfully protected me from being torn to shreds. They waited until I was level with the gate before sounding off their blood curdling howls. Even so, the street was like a graveyard.

I knew I had arrived when I saw the tram tracks. The shelter, with slatted seats, was designed to prevent people from getting comfortable. However, it wasn't long before the all night tram waddled up the incline to the terminal. It surely was a museum item, even back then in 1951. However, I was glad to escape the cold wind and to have the company of a fellow human being.

The tram driver was a very congenial chap and kept me entertained with stories of his tram driving adventures. When we arrived at the city terminal, I was

reluctant to disembark but the driver explained that he wasn't allowed to transport homeless people. He also warned me to keep an eye out for the police as they were locking up people who had no proof of accommodation. He suggested that I return to the Flinders Street area via the side streets.

As I walked through the deserted streets, the clocks were sounding one a.m. Eventually, I found myself back at the Flinders Street Station. Now wide-awake, my adrenalin had kicked in and my senses were on high alert. The area around the Flinders Street station and bridge was completely deserted. I was a sitting duck for any patrol car that happened along. Eventually I found a bus shelter. Though dingy and smelly, it was possible to huddle up in a corner and keep out of sight. I was contemplating stretching out when a patrol car came over the bridge. I quickly scrunched up into a ball, and hiding my face under my overcoat I prayed I wouldn't be noticed. They must have had a call as they sped passed.

This wasn't a good place to spend the rest of the night, so I went exploring. Around the corner, I discovered a high wall that divided the traffic from the railway tracks that ran under the bridge. At one point along the wall there was a solid stone support. It was about two foot

shorter than the wall. I clambered up its rough stones to see how far down the tracks were. There I found a primitive ladder leaning against the wall that led down to the railway tracks. Everything looked peaceful down below so I crept down the swaying ladder, reminding myself that I would have to return the same way. It didn't reach all the way so I had to drop a good six feet to the edge of the tracks. Tumbling down the last little bit of the embankment, I ended up close to a railway carriage. It was unlocked and had soft seats.

I was soon sound asleep and dead to the world. It was the jarring, jolting movement that brought me back to wakefulness. The carriage was moving, so without hesitation I opened the door and jumped out. The train was picking up speed so it wasn't a clean jump. Rolling down the embankment I collided with a signal pole. Shaking myself into full alert, I checked my watch. It was 5:45am. I had fifteen minutes to clamber back up the ladder, race back across the bridge and get myself over to the YMCA.

The hardest part was scrambling up the embankment to reach the bottom rung of the ladder. After three attempts I managed to grab the bottom rung. It was a great relief to drop down onto the footpath. By 6:00am, I was sitting on the bottom step of my meeting place.

The PD Secretary was late and when he arrived, he took one look at me and asked, "Have you been in an accident?"

I promised to explain my dishevelled condition as we drove off on our way to Hamilton.

I was looking forward to my new territory and the adventures I knew awaited me. At eighteen, I was about to be thrown into the deep end. I had already stumbled through the gateway of the 'University of Hard Knocks' but now I was about to enter the front door.

CHAPTER TWO

"But in every place they were to accept the hospitality of those who were worthy, those who would welcome them heartily as if entertaining Christ Himself" D A p351.

My new boss had another colporteur with him in the front seat so I settled into the back seat of his new Holden. After I explained why I was in such a dishevelled state, they changed the subject but I couldn't keep my eyes open and was soon sound asleep.

The next thing I knew, they were shaking me into wakefulness. I had slept all the way to Hamilton. As my eyes began to focus, I saw a kind looking, grey haired old lady, standing by a gate that led to a friendly, well-kept weatherboard cottage. It was partly hidden behind some shrubs that were holding hands with a collection of rose bushes.

After the cold, city streets of Melbourne, it looked like heaven. The widow who would be my landlady for the next few months had an inviting smile that would warm a frosty morning. As soon as we were introduced

she led me into the shelter of her clean, tidy home. My room had 'welcome' written all over it. The modest curtains moved as the gentle breeze entered through the open window that revealed a well-kept yard. There were fruit trees protecting a veggie garden and a green lawn.

I felt right at home as we explored the rest of the rooms. The bathroom was different. I would have to stand in an old fashioned bath that was surrounded by a curtain when I wanted a shower. That, I could handle, but not too often! It was a comfortable home that was clean and tidy. Soon I was introduced to the black cat that took a liking to me as most cats do. They love to display their affection by depositing as many hairs on my trousers as possible. I was warned that she liked to sleep on the foot of my bed. And this was before flea collars had been invented.

It soon became obvious I was in for some mothering, but that was ok as long as it didn't become smothering. This dear Christian saint was keen to make my stay as pleasant as possible. If she could cook as well as she kept house, I was in for a wonderful time. She was even willing to let me pay my board at the end of the week. I was almost broke with just enough shillings to buy my lunch each day. So, it was wise to eat a hearty

breakfast.

That night I shared my situation with my Heavenly Father. We had a very serious talk. There were some heavy reasons why I had to succeed as a colporteur. I had an ugly debt in the Book and Bible House as a result of my first vacation trying to sell books. It all happened in Warrnambool where my two companions and I failed miserably as salesmen. At the end of the ten weeks, we all agreed that salesmanship was not our calling. And here I was with the same set of books I was supposed to sell for the rest of this year! I had to master this salesmanship business or I would never get back to college. Then there was my need to eat. The next few weeks would be crucial. I made an agreement with God. I made a promise. I would be on the first door each morning, hail, shine, or rain, by 9:00am. He would have to send an angel or any other persuasive force, to interest the potential customer in what I had to offer. There had to be some supernatural involvement for the agreement to work. I had already learnt that selling religious books to secular non-readers is the most difficult and challenging occupation known to salesmen.

The widow exceeded my expectations in the culinary department. I was so hungry I could have eaten a cow

between two mattresses. How I enjoyed those nourishing, home cooked meals. I even spared a few tit-bits for Fluffy who liked to pat my leg with her paw. It was a very satisfied boarder, who fell into bed each night.

The cat woke me up by patting me on the cheek. Lucky for her it was time to get up and face a new day. After a good breakfast, I decided to check my bicycle, and then explore the town. Hamilton was a typical country town. There was nothing spectacular about it. It had what all towns need, and lacked what I believe all towns should have. I am all for wide streets, parks, sporting facilities and respectable public conveniences. Over the years I am sure this has occurred.

There were the usual divides between: new and old, rich and poor, neat and shabby and large and small homes. I decided to commence canvassing in the poor area on the outskirts and work my way towards the centre. My plan was to begin from the south and finally finish on the north side of town.

The next day I was on the first door by nine o'clock. It was a sunny day, I felt positive and the people were friendly. As part of our agreement, I had promised to put in the hours and chase up every interest. Somehow,

we had to work together to stimulate interest in a heavy, two volume set of books on the life of Christ. I was literally selling religious books to people who had no idea how much they needed them. This was cutting edge salesmanship.

Without God's help I was in a hopeless situation. I was poorly trained, inexperienced and immature. I had a little bit of faith or I thought I did, and a whole lot of desperation. Being forced into a situation by debt, need and poverty, I just had to sell books. Having done everything I was supposed to do - memorizing the canvass and getting myself smartly dressed, I prayed for divine guidance, after I had had a shower behind the curtain, while standing in the old porcelain bath.

My first day went reasonably well. Two orders with deposits and a lot of helps (Bedtime Stories) sold for cash. The people were friendly, even the refusals were done in a kindly way. The dogs were docile, the kids respectful, the sun was shining - what more could a colporteur want! There was also weight in my pocket to make the day complete. As the days came and went, I felt more confident. My presentation became more professional as I relaxed in the presence of strangers.

By the end of the week, there were eleven orders with

deposits written up. With the deposits plus the cash from the Bedtime Stories, I was able to pay my board, put some cash away for future needs and start paying off my debt. Things were looking positive. God was surely keeping His part of the bargain, for which I thanked Him that night.

The widow was doing her part too. She encouraged me, fed me with appetizing meals, prayed with me and for me, and even encouraged her friends to view the books.

The church members were very supportive as well. They invited me to their homes for meals and even bought books for their children. Sabbaths were great times of fellowship with a busy morning then church lunch, followed by the young people's program. It was encouraging to have a strong group of Christian people supporting me as I struggled to get on my feet.

Life just kept getting better as the weeks sped by - until I had a dog week. On the Tuesday, I was attacked by an ankle-biter extraordinaire. The lady dog lover let the monster out when she opened the front door. She knew what would happen but didn't seem to care. The ferocious mutt was more fluff than substance but had shark's teeth. He shook a mouthful of my trousers until

they ripped then grabbed a piece of leg that also ripped. While I was jumping about he attacked my bag. The teeth marks remained with my bag until its dying day.

I used my bag as a shield as I backed away down the stairs, along the path and quickly shut the gate. The lion tamer watched from her verandah until she was sure that I was going next door, and then she went inside. Not a word did she utter. While I was tying my handkerchief around the wound to stop the bleeding, the vicious little brute was trying to get at me through the fence. After telling him what I thought of him, I moved on.

That evening I was grateful for my landlady's first aid skills as she repaired my leg and my trousers. It was obvious that my first purchase, when funds permitted, would be a new pair of trousers. By the end of the next day I was limping like a wounded soldier.

Thursday was another dog day. This time a pint-sized killer was waiting for me at the gate. He dared me to enter with the most vocal solo imaginable. I would have passed by but I noticed toys lying about with other evidence to indicate that there was a young family in residence. Hanging on the clothesline, were what salesmen call colporteur flags. These items were more

commonly known as nappies. Here was a prospect too good to miss. The challenge, however, was how to get passed the guard dog.

All of a sudden, a strategy became obvious. I stirred up the little noise-bag until he was croaking with anger, then I opened the gate. He rushed out to do battle as I hopped the fence and closed the gate. Now he was on the outside with me on the inside. I thought the whole neighbourhood would have been aroused, but they must have been used to his tirades. Even the occupants weren't troubled as no one came to the door until I knocked.

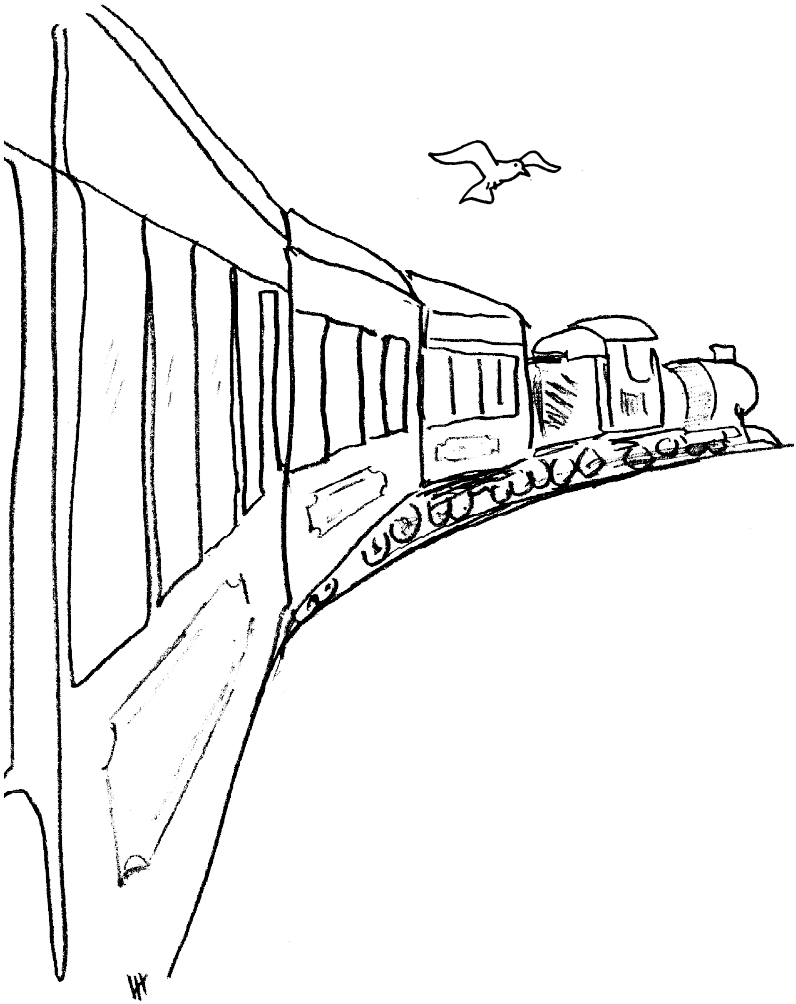
The lady was very interested in my presentation but along the way, she noticed her crazed pet jumping up and down outside the fence. The volume was decreasing as his voice dropped a few octaves. I quickly assured her that I would let him in on my way out. It was a good sale, a set of 'The Desire of Ages' plus some children's books. Cash sales were rare but when they happen, it gave you a boost and saved on shoe leather as you walked on air for a while.

The lady decided to walk me to the gate. My heart was racing as I prayed for an angel. My prayer was heard, as a cry for her attention came from inside the house.

My wonderful customer thanked me for coming and disappeared inside. That was too close. Now, to deal with the ferocious leg eater! I didn't have to stir him up. He was nearly having a fit. Once again, I opened the gate and jumped the fence. He did a smart u-turn and collided with the gate as I shut it in his face.

I had never seen such a frustrated dog. He bit the wire strands of the gate, jumped up and down, while yelling at the top of his now husky voice. After telling him a thing or two, I went next door. I hate it when dogs warn the entire street that a stranger is about. I like the element of surprise when calling on people. However, in this case the dog had cried wolf so often that no one took any notice.

Well, there was no element of surprise when I called at the next house. The lady was waiting for me with the door open and a smile on her face. The friendly dog-owner had rung to share the good news. This time it was a firm order with a deposit, accompanied by a drink and a big piece of cake. I was really enjoying being a colporteur.



CHAPTER THREE

"All should find something to do that will be beneficial to themselves and helpful to others" DA p72.

Sundays were the lonely days. Everyone was busy but me, so I just rode around to see what I could see. Hamilton was a sleepy country town but on Sundays, it died. The churches were busy in the mornings but in the afternoons the whole place closed down.

This was before supermarkets, malls, church picnics or Sunday football. The service stations closed midday on Saturday until Monday morning. Hotels were closed and even the corner stores shut their doors. There were no green, leafy parks where people took their families for picnics or young people could play ball.

One Sunday, as I was riding through town, I noticed a lad carrying some paper bags and a large bottle of soft drink. He must have found a milkbar open somewhere. I pulled up beside him and asked where he was going. He informed me that he was going down to the tracks. I

was curious, so he explained that he and his mates were holed up in a railway carriage. He invited me to join him and see for myself.

The railway yards were deserted. All the rolling stock was sitting there unattended, with an atmosphere of dejection. It was a 'no one loves me' scene. My new friend and I climbed up into a first class carriage. We worked our way along to the lounge to discover a group of youths sitting around, looking like they owned the place.

One boy was trying to learn how to smoke, four others were playing cards, two boys were sharing a men's magazine and an older lad in his early twenties was playing a dice game with four or five other boys. It was quite an amazing scene. They welcomed me and invited me to join in but there wasn't anything going on that interested me so I just watched.

I discovered that this was their usual Sunday activity. This was their club house and the only place where they could get together. Obviously we all had one thing in common, we were all bored. It was perplexing to consider why the civic fathers had no inclination to provide facilities for their youth. These healthy lads should be playing sport, going on organized hikes,

canoeing down rivers or climbing mountains. Nothing good could result from this confinement. Soon I was tired of watching the lads trying to amuse themselves so I bade them farewell and went back to my bike riding.

I decided to go for a ride in the country, as there was nothing of interest to amuse me in town. As I rode along a picturesque country lane, I thought about the bored group of lads trying to make the most of their empty Sundays.

No doubt the civic fathers were very busy entertaining themselves at the golf club, the RSL or polo club, but what about the youth? Fortunately these lads weren't getting into any mischief. They could have amused themselves trashing the carriages, or decorating them with graffiti but they were just quietly trying to entertain themselves with games and pointless pastimes.

It only took one phone call to turn things around for me. The Melbourne Office had a surprise for me. They wanted me to partner up with a college graduate for a few weeks. He was on transfer to the mission field but was planning to get married first and needed something to do while he waited for his big day. He also needed some pocket money. My minders never disclosed why they chose me to baby-sit this bridegroom but some

companionship would never go astray.

My new partner was full of surprises. He was a Queenslander so he didn't take life too seriously. His priority was to enjoy himself and make the most of every day. The best feature was his car. He drove a red Chevy coupe, the kind that made people stop and stare. He agreed to let me share the driving even though I didn't have a license.

My fun loving partner had never sold the 'Desire of Ages' so I had to give him a crash course. We went over the set canvass and we practiced on each other until he had a fair idea of how to present the books. We agreed to work the untouched, outlying country towns. This was a blessing as I had been wondering how I would get around to covering the country by pushbike. Surely God is great. He always comes to our rescue.

Actually, I wondered why he had been asked to sell such a difficult book if he needed cash in a hurry. There was a host of get rich quick rackets available. One in particular had tempted me. One day I was coming out of a house when I met a chap at the gate. He asked me what I was doing as he didn't want to cramp my style. He was collecting for the blind. He shared with me how easy it was to make good money. He usually

skipped the homes, but had finished the business sector faster than expected, so decided to do a few streets. He gave receipts and was allowed to keep 50% of what he collected. He was averaging twenty pounds a day. I couldn't do that in a week.

The graduate was keen to get going which was gratifying so we selected an area where I could canvass the towns while he worked the farms. It worked well and we were pleased with our success. My friend made progress in other ways as well. I was amazed at how the red coupe attracted attention, especially the female kind. There were times when I had to amuse myself on a park bench or a bus shelter while a local girl or two went for a spin in the Chevy. He made the most of his opportunities while still single.

Again the days and weeks sped by as we worked our way through the territory. Then it came time for my friend to say farewell and do what had to be done to bring his bachelorhood to an end.

Eventually it was time for a new territory. I felt sad about moving on as I had become comfortable living in Hamilton and felt part of the local church family. It was like a Western where the cowboy is always riding off into the sunset. I had been offered jobs and

encouraged to settle but I had a goal and settling in Hamilton wasn't it.

Hamilton had been kind to me. It had been a gentle launch into full time colporteur ministry and I felt that I was getting into the swing of things. I felt ready for what lay ahead. It was hard saying goodbye to my kind hostess who had made my stay so pleasant.

This was a happy time in my life as I enjoyed the taste of success. Now, well on my way to paying off my debt, I had some money in the bank and a feeling of self-confidence which was important to my growing into manhood. The Lord had been very kind to me and was now telling me that I must take the next step on this exciting journey. It was time for a new territory. The publishing people made an appointment to collect me and take me to the town of Stawell, in the central west of the state. I had never heard of the place and had no idea what was in store for me. However, I was soon to discover that one place can be very different to another.

CHAPTER FOUR

"The example of Christ in linking himself with the interests of humanity should be followed by all who preach His word, and by all who have received the gospel of His grace" DA p152.

My minders arrived on time. So as soon as the goodbyes were said, we were on our way. I was bursting to share all my adventures with the two publishing men and the fellow colporteur, also on his way to a new territory.

They had warm ears by the time we arrived at Stawell. I was intrigued to learn that I would be boarding with another widow. Evidently there were three Adventist widows living in the town. They never met together as they couldn't get on. It was explained to me that the local church building had been closed for some years.

This would be my first experience at living and working in a town without any church fellowship. I didn't know at the time, but it would be like that for the rest of the year. Now I was not only entering a new era

but was about to face new temptations and would experience the real meaning of loneliness.

On the way to Stawell, I was brought up-to-date on new methods for approaching potential customers and techniques for getting inside homes. As a teenager I was reluctant to enter the homes of strangers. Now I would have to enter homes where some women were in dressing gowns. I had met some who were still in dressing gowns as late as mid-day but as I had always canvassed them at the door, it hadn't bothered me. However, the Publishing men assured me that canvassing people in their homes would increase my sales so this would raise the bar as I worked my new territory

I was hoping that the publishing men would stay for a few days to check my canvassing skills, observe my presentation and generally give me the once over. Unfortunately, it was not to be. They had plans to train another colporteur. I would have liked some polishing, as I had not had a lot of grounding in the art of salesmanship.

Stawell looked a bit scruffy, with a lot of tired looking houses that needed some TLC. However, I learned that it was a town with a fascinating past. The area was first

explored in 1838.The first land grant of two hundred, thousand acres was settled in 1840. In 1853, gold was discovered and mined continuously for the next sixty years. There were approximately thirty thousand people living and working around Stawell by 1857. It was the largest and busiest settlement in Victoria at the time.

In 1858, Stawell was declared a township and in 1989 a city. Now in 1951 this would be my new place of abode where I would visit every home. It was an average size town but there was a large country area and no one was telling me how it could all be accomplished by pushbike. No doubt the Lord would take care of that.

I was introduced to my new carer who stood with a blank stare on the verandah. Then, when the publishing men left, she silently opened the door for me to enter with my luggage. I went back fifty years in time when I entered the little, timber cottage. The floorboards creaked as I gingerly trod my way to the room that would be my new world of seclusion.

The musty room had an ancient bed with an old, lumpy kapok mattress resting on a very saggy wire bed frame. There was an antique wardrobe, the kind that skeletons fall out of, a dressing table and a chair. The curtains were doing their best to conceal the outside world, but

looked sad and in need of needle and thread. On the dressing table was the inevitable washbasin and jug. A patched and faded quilt covered the bed and a small well-used mat invited me to sit on the bed and let my feet feel at home.

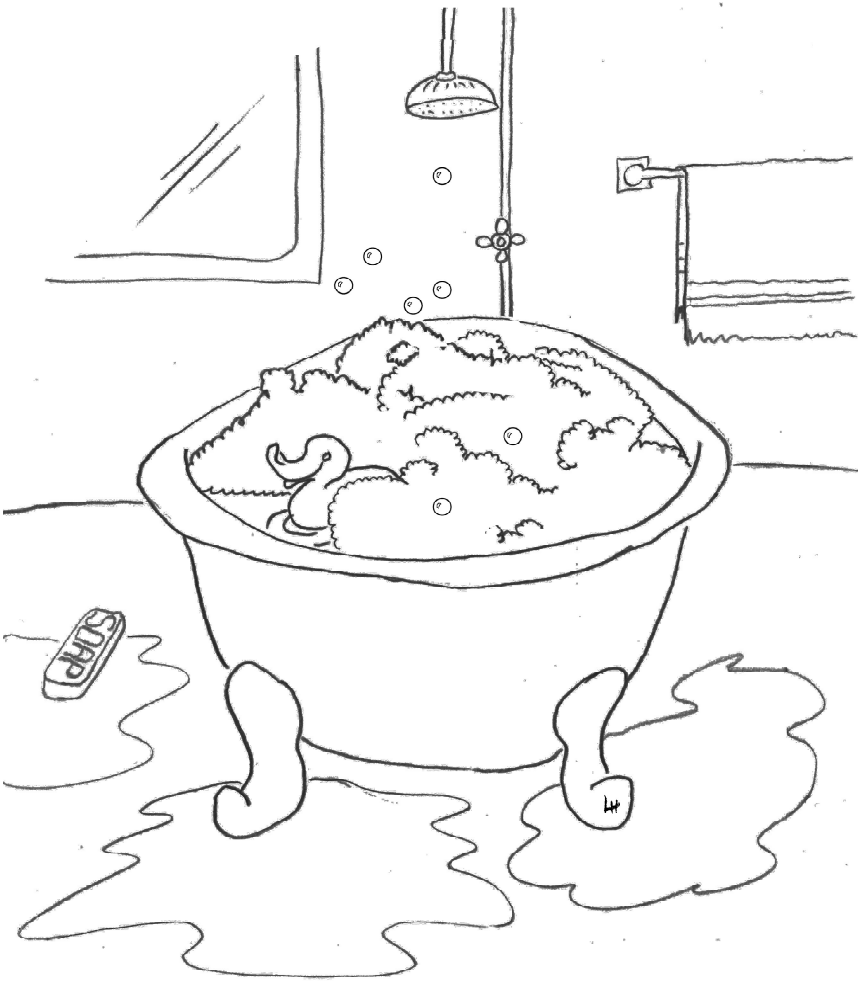
This lady was a very different grandmother to the one I had just got used to. She was curt, unsmiling and treated me like an intruder. I wondered how much pressure had been put on her before she had agreed to accommodate me. She was obviously uncomfortable playing the part of a landlady.

I had just finished hanging up my clothes when my hostess called me for dinner. I was wondering what was in store for my empty stomach as I made my way along the dimly lit hallway. My first surprise was meeting Ginger the cat. He gave me a friendly welcome and went to work like my previous Fluffy friend depositing his colourful fur over my trouser legs. My hostess wordlessly showed me to the table and handed me a bowl of stew that didn't smell like a vegetarian's delight.

I was hungry enough to eat the wall paper so I wasn't about to start removing lumps of meat from the stew. There were no refills so I filled the remaining space with white bread and jam. The silence was only broken

when the widow asked if I wanted a cut lunch. I quickly informed her that I would not have room in my bag and would look for a corner store each day.

It proved pointless to loiter at the table hoping for dessert. When the good lady turned to the sink to wash the dishes I realized the meal was over. I said good night and returned to my bedroom where the 25watt bulb did its best to illuminate the space around the bed. I had a very clear impression that life in Stawell would be quite different from anything I had experienced before.


SOAP

CHAPTER FIVE

"The angels of God are ascending, bearing the prayers of the needy and distressed to the Father above, and descending, bringing blessing and hope, courage, help, and life, to the children of men" DA p143.

The new day held many surprises, but the first one was more of a shock. I didn't expect a flash bathroom but what presented itself was horrifying. The old tin bath was connected to an ancient rusting chip heater. The kind you threw in handfuls of wood chips.

The next step was to get a fire going, which would hopefully warm the water. The process would eventually heat the water hot enough for a bath. There were no chips available, so a cold wash would have to do for the present. Obviously a bath would have to happen at the end of the day.

The next day, with my body fortified by two weetbix moistened by powdered milk, followed by a hard-boiled egg and a well-toasted slice of bread, I headed out to view my new territory. My strategy was to be like Al

Capone and "Case the Joint." It only took me an hour to explore the city and work out how to tackle the task ahead.

From the very first day, I found the people quite friendly and easy to approach. They were mostly working-class types with growing families. There were children in nearly every house, so by lunchtime, my order book was looking quite healthy.

Finding a corner store with the necessary quiet park close by, I satisfied my hunger under a shady tree. By late afternoon I was satisfied with my day's work and peddled back to my new accommodation, feeling quite pleased with myself. But most of all, I thanked the Lord for a soft landing with encouraging results.

As I relaxed that evening in my little bedroom, with the tabby cat purring at my feet, I considered the amazing aspects of what was going on. Here I was, an inexperienced, poorly trained eighteen-year-old youth selling a two-volume set of books on the life of Christ to secular people who had no interest in religion. There was something miraculous happening here and I prayed that it would continue.

As I rode along with my bag of books balanced on the

handlebars, I sang praises to the Lord for the angels He sent to accompany me as I worked my way from door to door. I even chuckled over the fun I was having trying to have a bath.

Each day I took a good hour for lunch, as it had to be the most important meal of the day. To compliment the meagre evening meals, I smuggled snack foods to hide in the dresser drawer. The tabby cat also appreciated the extra rations.

By now, the days were getting shorter and the mornings, cooler as the autumn months crept towards winter. It was getting harder to be on the first door by nine o'clock but that was the deal I had with the Lord. He was certainly doing His part as my order books filled up. I had to do my part.

One bright, shiny day I met a friendly young mother who expressed her concern over the declining morals of society and their negative influence on her children. She invited me in and showed an enthusiastic interest in my books. It was an easy cash sale, which was rather rare. She also bought a set of Bedtime Stories. Then to my delight, she suggested that we go next door to meet her neighbour.

The neighbour was equally excited about the books and made the same purchase. What amazed me was their enthusiasm. It wasn't a common occurrence for customers to get so excited over my books. It really gave me a boost. I was walking on air for the rest of the day. Only the Lord knew what an influence those books would have on the lives of those two families. Mostly the books had to compete with comics, novels, magazines, secular books and education. At least I was getting them into the homes. The rest was up to higher powers. Some were going into such unlikely homes it caused me to walk away shaking my head in amazement.

One night my prayer was mixed between gratitude and a request for help to find a more suitable place to live. I was losing weight and eating too much packaged food. I was not a welcome border and needed to leave. I was also neglecting my personal hygiene, as I was mostly too tired of an evening to be bothered with the old tin bath and the rusty chip heater.

It was a very lonely existence with no one interested in my daily adventures. Every day provided me with amazing stories with only a cat to share them with. I had given up trying to engage my hostess in conversation. She lived in her own little world and refused to open a window.

I had canvassed the poorer section of town, so with trepidation I studied the town map to select my new territory. I decided to tackle the more well-heeled part of town. There must be some miracles waiting to happen on the other side of the tracks.

CHAPTER SIX

"Circumstances may separate us from every earthly friend; but no circumstance, no distance, can separate us from the heavenly Comforter. Wherever we are, wherever we may go, He is always at our right hand to support, sustain, uphold, and cheer"
DA p670.

On my way to the 'other' side of town, I prayed the angels would be especially active. From previous experience, I had learnt the 'well-to-do', are usually less interested in door-to-door salesmen, let alone sellers of religious books. I endured rejection after rejection until I met a friendly grandmother who paid cash for a set of books for her granddaughter who was about to be married.

At last I had broken the resistance. The next house was hidden behind shrubs and bushes. Beautiful roses grew from the gate, all the way up to the front verandah. It was obvious that I must become a great admirer of roses. I parked my bag out of sight, rang the doorbell and stepped back to where a big crimson rose was within

reach.

The lady of the house could see me at the top of the steps but had to open the screen door and step onto the verandah in order to ask what I wanted. At that point, I pushed my face into the delicate petals of the fragrant rose and breathed in deeply. I then raved on about the exquisite perfume of her majestic rose and suggested that it must be a very rare bloom.

My impeccable performance did the trick. The kind lady fell over herself explaining the virtues of her special roses. It was getting a bit overbearing, when she suddenly paused to ask what it was I wanted. We were standing in the middle of the garden at this point in time, so I gave her a big smile and apologized for my neglect and explained that I had something equally beautiful to show her.

The strategy worked so well, we were soon sitting in her lounge room, examining my books. We were half way through my canvass when she asked if I was a Seventh-day Adventist. Her question completely took the wind out of my sales. No one had ever asked me that before. Then, as soon as I admitted the fact, she stated that she was one too. I was lost for words.

It turned out that that this lady was one of the three widows that couldn't 'get on'. I could see why, although I had never met number three. Then the kind lady made an excellent suggestion. Would I like a drink of fruit juice and a piece of cake? My ships were all coming in at once but there was more. While I was polishing off a big slice of cream sponge, she asked me where I was staying. When I told her, she was quite astonished. She wondered how I had survived. I explained that it was a bit rugged and that I was looking for new accommodation.

Then, she nearly blew me away by suggesting that I might like to come and stay in her home. I would not be a boarder, but a guest. She had a spare room that was unused, where she suggested I would be very comfortable. So we went on an inspection tour. It was a very comfortable house with a modern bathroom. There was a shower in its own recess. Then, I nearly fell asleep looking at the bed in the spare room. This was real luxury. I had never stayed in such plush surroundings.

I was invited to move in as soon as it was convenient and there would be no cost. I would be a welcome guest. The good lady would provide breakfast and dinner, leaving me to find my own lunch. I couldn't believe my

ears. I had spent four weeks living in poverty and now I was going to live like a king. And for free.

We agreed that I would move in on the coming Sunday, which would be convenient for everyone. The landlady didn't turn a grey hair when I broke the news. It was a case of no comment. For me, Sunday couldn't come quick enough.

I rode my bike to my new address then rang for a taxi to take me to my old place of abode, where I collected my belongings and said my quick goodbyes. I couldn't believe my new surroundings. My room had thick carpets, colourful curtains, fluffy cushions, a soft mat by the bed and a desk with a comfortable chair. It wasn't heaven but it was half-way there.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"All who will go to work, trusting not in what they themselves can do, but in what God can do for and through them, will certainly realize the fulfillment of His promise. 'Greater works than these shall he do,' He declares; 'because I go unto my Father'" DA p667.

It was time to venture out into the country. Every time I studied my territory map, I felt stirred to go out and explore the unknown. Never had I attempted to go bush, as it were. The idea of heading out with no idea of where I would stay or where I would find a meal appeared as a fascinating challenge. It was time to put my faith into action and put my Lord to the test.

I planned a three-day journey into the sheep country that would take me on a round trip that would include two small country towns.

The forecast was for fine weather so on a Monday morning, I pushed an extra set of books into my bag, loaded as many helps as I could carry and set off in the

direction of a little spot on the map called Navare.

As I was leaving Stawell, I came across a small group of houses nestled amongst some rocks, piles of tailings, old mine shafts and broken down machinery. The first two houses were empty but the third house looked hopeful as there were broken toys scattered around the yard and colporteur flags hanging from the cloths line. I hesitated at the rickety gate, wondering if I should or shouldn't. The house was in a bad state of disrepair with broken verandah railings and a dangerous looking set of crooked stairs. I decided to give it a try. At least, there were no dogs.

I walked carefully over the verandah's missing boards. The screen door hung by one hinge and under a glassless window sat an old, dilapidated couch with stuffing poking through. What really got my attention was a stack of comics piled up on a small table at the head of the couch. It looked like these people were avid readers. This could be a rewarding place for a book salesman.

In response to my knock, a husky voice called, 'who's there?' While I was struggling to come up with an appropriate answer, the occupant shouted for me to come in. I hesitated. There was some movement then suddenly something large came waddling up the

hallway. The lady of the house could see me more clearly than I could see her. She wanted to know if I was selling something.

I had leant my bag against the wall of the house, so when the lady opened the screen door it was hidden from view. This was because the bottom half of the door was patched with a square of cardboard. The top half was empty. She didn't have to open the screen door but for some reason, she pushed it open and stood there glaring at me. She was the most intimidating female I had ever faced. If she had a husband, he had most likely fled a long time ago.

It was easy to understand why the front lawn was such an untidy mess. There were broken toys scattered about, an armless doll, a pushbike with one wheel, a wheelless wheelbarrow and a fence propped up by sticks. None of this compared to the sight of the lady wrestler who was clenching and unclenching her fists.

I mentioned the comics and explained I was promoting material that was popular with the reading public. However, I pushed the wrong button. The lady assumed that I was an encyclopaedia salesman and exploded. Her words were unprintable as she moved towards me with a menacing expression on her angry face.

As she stepped out onto the verandah, the screen door slammed shut, exposing my bag innocently leaning against the house. When she caught sight of the bag, she lined up for a kick that would have put my bag into the next-door-neighbour's yard. I moved so quickly, that it took her by surprise. My next move was down the rickety steps. I was just in time to avoid another poorly aimed kick.

By this time she was letting the whole neighbourhood know what she thought of book salesmen. I had never heard a woman swear so profusely. She was red in the face and shaking with rage. Fortunately for me, she remained on the verandah. As I approached the gate, she increased the volume. By this time, I must confess, I too was getting hot under the collar but had refrained from any verbal response.

The next event in the drama nearly caused her to implode. As I was struggling with the old wrought-iron gate, I caught my bag on a loose wire and in my annoyance I slammed the gate. To my horror, the rusty hinges gave way, causing it to collapse in a heap at my feet. It was almost possible to see the steam pouring out of her ears. I was grateful for those fragile stairs, which she was evidently unwilling to negotiate. I could still hear her shouting as I rode out of the miserable

little village.

It was a relief to be out in open country and still in one piece. I was now on my way to explore the sheep country and was soon on a gravel road with no houses in sight, just open country dotted with scattered flocks of sheep, a few dead trees and open plains stretching all the way to the horizon. After awhile, the gravel gave way to hard sand with soft patches that made the going quite laborious. At times I had to stand up in order to force the pedals to keep me mobile. It was then tragedy struck.

Without warning, the left hand cotter-pin snapped, rendering the peddle-arm useless. It happened as I was struggling through a patch of soft sand. Now I was in a fix. Should I turn back or carry on? According to the map, I was about half way with roughly ten miles in each direction.

I had put a lot of time and prayer into this adventure, having made it an exercise in faith. To turn back now, seemed like a retreat. It didn't fit with a faith experiment. So I began the long walk to wherever. The sun was getting low when I heard a vehicle coming up behind me. I moved to the grass verge, to allow the Austin A70 to pass. As the utility came level, a pleasant lady's

voice asked if I had a problem. I explained that the cotter-pin had snapped so I was unable to ride.

At this, the driver got out and offered to give me a lift. They squeezed up to make room for me to join them in the front and loaded my bike into the back. They were curious as to where I was going and why. I explained that I was a college student earning my fees so that I could continue my education.

A few minutes later, we turned down a sidetrack and bumped our way through some beautiful picturesque grassland, dotted with aged grey gums. We approached a friendly looking homestead with a wisteria-framed verandah. My new friends explained that I would be welcome to stay with them for the night.

After a delicious meal and a friendly discussion on religious topics, I was more than ready to splice the sheets. In the morning I awoke to the sound of pots and pans being put to good use in the kitchen. The cooking smells caused me to jump out of bed and quickly get myself ready for another day of adventure. The kind lady explained that her husband would be in later as he had to milk some cows and then repair my bike.

As I tucked into the tasty breakfast, the farmer's wife

explained that they had some old bicycles stored in the barn so there would be plenty of spare parts with which to do the necessary repairs. On the way to the barn, I met the farmer who had all ready repaired my bike. I was overjoyed to have it back like new.

I was sad to leave, as this was the lifestyle I had always dreamt about. A few days on the farm would have suited me fine. But, the Lord had other plans for me. As I was saying farewell to these kind Presbyterian Christians, the farmer asked if I was short of cash. He indicated that they would be happy to assist me with a contribution if I was finding the way hard. I assured him that they had already made a valuable contribution and that I would never forget their kindness.

The farmer then explained that Navare was just a little place with a wool shed, a couple of workmen's cottages and some empty buildings. He thought that I would be well received by the few farmers along the road to Crowlands, where there were a dozen or so houses, a hotel and a general store.

It was a beautiful day and as I peddled along the dusty gravel road, I sang all the praise songs I could remember plus a few of Tex Morton's ballads. I enjoyed being in God's hands and knew that He had everything under

control. There were some nice people living on that lonely, back road who made my day a very pleasant one.

It was mid afternoon when I began canvassing the town of Crowlands. As I worked my way through the houses, I was mindful of my need to find some accommodation. I certainly couldn't afford to stay in the hotel so by late afternoon, I began asking if there was a boarding house or some place where I could stay for the night. However, it appeared that the hotel was the only place to stay. One lady, who appreciated what I was doing, suggested I call on the new vicar at the Presbyterian Church Manse. She explained there were plenty of empty rooms in the big old house.

The new vicar was an intern. He and his new wife were having a break from his studies to gain some practical experience. They would be serving the congregation for two years. The helpful lady explained that the parish appreciated the friendly and down-to-earth young couple. They also sounded like the kind of Christians who would take pity on a struggling student who was hungry and who had nowhere to stay for the night.

The church and manse were on the edge of town,

behind some gum trees and a picket fence that had enjoyed better days. The old buildings were made of stone and brick, and were in need of some tender loving care. I rang the bell but there was no response and decided it could be broken. It always puzzled me why so many doorbells and buzzers failed to perform their duty. No one ever puts an out-of-order sign up, to save people from spending so much time waiting for nothing to happen.

Some vigorous knocking brought to the door a handsome young man in shirtsleeves and crumpled trousers. He greeted me with a friendly smile and asked if there was anything he could do for me. My response was very honest and caused us both to have a good laugh. He and his wife were only too happy to have me as their first guest.

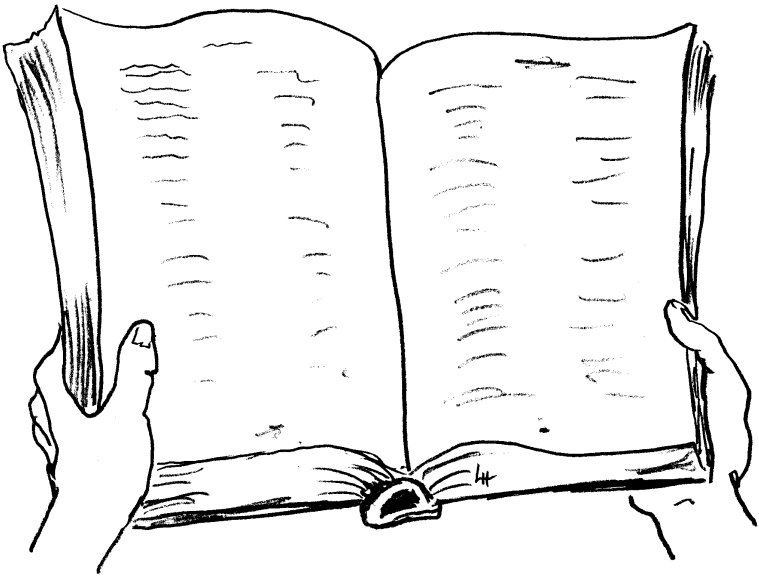
That evening I had my first introduction to modernistic theology. I was amazed at what they didn't believe, and again at what they did. We stayed up late that night discussing a range of topics that revealed a huge gap between our beliefs. However, I was encouraged by their living faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and His plan for their lives. I went to bed feeling comfortable with their love for God and their fellow men.

As I headed back to Stawell, on a much better road, I hoped that God would continue to lead those two dedicated young people and that they would respond to His guidance. My thoughts were punctuated by an appreciation for the lovely scenery I was riding through. The country was a little on the dry side but the sheep looked fat and contented as they grew next season's woollen clothing. I also enjoyed the shade provided by the huge grey gums lining both sides of the road.

The only down-side to the salubrious environment, was the lack of homesteads. There had to be some somewhere, but the farms in the area must have been enormous. Obviously, I was passing through a district of very large sheep stations. It was passed lunchtime and I was hungry enough to eat anything, when I rounded a corner and came across a house just a few yards from the road.

The lady seemed very uncomfortable with my presence and indicated that she would be very pleased to see me go. As I was putting my books back into my bag, I mentioned the fact that I was starving hungry and could I buy a sandwich or a piece of fruit? She suggested that I sit on the back steps while she prepared something for me. After a few minutes, she handed me a paper bag, wished me good luck and quickly closed the door.

I found a log to sit on and investigated the fat lunch bag. The contents proved more than satisfying and as I was most grateful, it was a short grace. The tasty sandwiches and fruit sustained me for my long journey home. That night, as I lay in my comfortable bed, I reviewed the happenings of the last three days and thanked the Good Lord for the evidence of his constant care, ranging from meeting the very willing to the more reluctant.



CHAPTER EIGHT

"At all times and in all places, in all sorrows and in all afflictions, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone, the Comforter will be sent in answer to the prayer of faith" DA p669.

The kindly mothering gradually turned into smothering. Mrs. M insisted I always be on time for the evening meal. I did my best but there were times when I was delayed by a customer or had to wait for a husband to give his approval.

One time a lady asked me to read a story to her three children while she answered the phone. I was half way through the book by the time she put the receiver down. I also found Mrs. M's habit of questioning where I had been or why was I going out, rather intrusive. Mostly my evening excursions were call-backs.

It was a regular occurrence for a wife to request that I call back after tea, to demonstrate the books to her husband. I enjoyed these outings, as they were mostly

relaxed contacts that would lead into a friendly chat and a pleasant evening of socializing.

The uneasy situation came to a head during the visit of the Crusaders for Christ. I had been expecting their arrival for some weeks due to their advertising in shop windows and on lampposts. Their plan was to conduct a series of public meetings in the main street of Stawell. The program would continue for eight days and wind up in the local Anglican Church.

I warned Mrs. M that I would be going out after dinner, each evening to support the Crusaders for Christ. She couldn't understand why I would associate with another church group. I explained that I was starving for fellowship with Christian young people and was looking forward to hearing them preach. She believed that I was in danger of being led astray.

The Melbourne group, were a bright bunch of enthusiastic youth who really wanted to let the citizens of Stawell know that Jesus loves them and wants them to be saved. They had a small singing group, a lively song leader, some very good soloists and a small backing group of musicians. Their presentations were quite professional and their programs drew a good crowd.

Every night there would be some hecklers or a person who wanted to argue or debate. It was all very exciting to me and I became quite involved. I would help with the packing up after each presentation and attended their special prayer fellowship before they went to their sleeping quarters. They were the most sincere Christians I had ever met. The entire exercise proved a spiritual boost to my growing faith.

On the Thursday night, a group of rowdy, young chaps from another religion, wanted to have a debate. They had their Bibles and catechisms and insisted on sharing their views, as it was a public place. The Pastor, who was leading the Crusaders for Christ, explained that they were not there to debate but to preach about Jesus. The leader of the young men felt that the people were only hearing one side of the story and believed they had something to contribute. They also argued not everything the Crusaders for Christ were preaching was correct.

This stirred up one of the fiery young Crusaders who stepped up to the challenger and asked him to reveal where they were preaching error. For the next hour, the debate ranged from one hot topic to another. The crowd was enjoying every minute of the confrontation. But when tempers flared, the Pastor called it a day and said

goodnight to the amused onlookers. The prayer session was a bit longer than usual that night so it was quite late when I arrived home.

As I was tip-towing towards my bedroom, Mrs. M called out to remind me that I was a guest in her house and that she didn't approve of me staying out to all hours of the night. If I was going to spend my evenings wandering about the streets, I had better find alternative accommodation. I knew it was useless trying to explain, so after an apology I went off to bed.

With the excitement of the evening and the scolding for being late, sleep eluded me. As I lay in bed, contemplating my future, I realized that it wasn't fair for me to cause my kind hostess any inconvenience. I would have to look for accommodation that would allow me freedom to come and go as I pleased.

At breakfast time, I was lectured on the curtsies involved in living in another person's home. The guest is expected to abide by the rules and practices of the host or family with whom he is accommodated. There are times for meals, a time to rise and a time to retire. It is not expected that guests would cause stress to the occupiers of the home.

I went off to work with my tail well and truly between my legs. It took a couple of orders to re-establish my confidence and get me back on track. It was just as well as I was about to face a situation I had been warned about but had never encountered. A bleary eyed, dishevelled young woman answered the door and invited me in. I suggested that she might like to know why I was calling, before she asked me in. When she hesitated, I quickly explained the purpose of my visit. I was quite surprised that she still invited me in.

There were no signs of children so I concentrated on 'The Desire of Ages'. She obviously looked like she needed some spiritual enlightenment. We sat on the lounge, as I went through the canvass, while trying to draw her attention to the pictures, she was letting her dressing gown fall open and sitting as close as possible. It was a scary situation. I decided to draw the canvass to a close as quickly as I could. Then to my amazement, she asked me how much the books were. As soon as she heard the price, she went into her bedroom and returned with the full amount. She paid cash, thanked me for calling and went to the door to let me out.

Out in the fresh air, I thanked the Lord for having His hand over what I thought was going to be a tricky situation. The angels were certainly with me and were

evidently anxious for that young lady to have the opportunity to access the contents of Ellen White's inspired books. The neighbours were astounded when they learnt that the sleepy customer had purchased a set of books. To my amazement, they placed an order as well. Maybe it was just to keep up with the Joneses but it made my day.

As I munched my lunch in a pleasant, shady park, I contemplated my next move and got to thinking about the old man whose house occupied the back half of Mrs. M's property. There was a high hedge separating the two dwellings. But it did more than that. The front section represented the new Stawell while the back section was the old Stawell. To enter the old man's domain, was like stepping back into the past. For some reason, Mrs. M had nothing to do with the old man. However, over the weeks, I had got to know him and found him a delightful and interesting person. He was one of the old pioneers of the district, who had been a gold miner, a boundary rider, a prospector, and truck driver. He was just overflowing with stories of the good old days.

In his back yard was an old caravan. It was not in very good condition but could be just what I was looking for.

CHAPTER NINE

"There is greater encouragement for us in the least blessing we ourselves receive from God than all the accounts we can read of the faith and experience of others"
DA p348.

I learnt that Mrs. M's husband had purchased the front half of the old man's block to build the home where I had been staying. Evidently there was something untoward about the transaction, so relations were strained. When I explained to the old man why I was looking for a new place to stay, he just shook his head and agreed to let me have the use of the caravan for a small payment to cover the electricity.

The winter was setting in as I was settling into my new accommodation. The caravan wasn't lined and there was no power available for a heater so it looked like I was in for a cool time. The old man was willing to share his kitchen with its huge, wood fired stove. It was a large room where he spent most of his time. It was full of relics and treasures from days long gone. The whole house was more like a museum. There were

cabinets stuffed with a variety of objects that reminded him of his past. There was also a musty old couch, where he slept when it was too cold to use his bedroom. He offered me the free use of his pots and pans, as a reward for keeping the wood box full.

This would be my first experience at preparing meals. I decided to make a stew, like my mother used to make. After cleaning out one of the old man's large cooking pots I made a list of potential ingredients. Then I went shopping for food items that didn't require refrigeration. This was fun, and I determined to make a stew to end all stews!

That night, the old man and I enjoyed a big bowl of vegetable stew. There was plenty left over so I planned to shop for some different items on my way home the next day, which I would add to the original mix to vary the taste. The stew didn't need refrigeration, as the nights were so cold, it had a layer of ice covering it the next morning.

My first night in the caravan was quite an ordeal. The bed was more like a well-worn trampoline. It sagged almost to the floor so I borrowed some cardboard boxes to give it some support. The mattress was a lumpy old kapok that would go into any shape you chose. During

the night, it would have a mind of its own and go in all different directions. To keep warm, I covered myself with a borrowed blanket then laid out sheets of newspaper. To keep everything in place, I put my navy-blue overcoat over the lot and tucked the sleeves in under the mattress. Most nights, I got up and put on more clothing. I don't remember ever being so cold. At the back of the house was a water tank on a low stand, which supplied me with water. In the mornings, the water had frozen in the tap so I had to dip a jug full from the inlet at the top. I always had to break the ice in order to access the water.

The old man became like a favourite uncle. He was such a gentle, kind, and patient person, with a great sense of humour. Every morning he had to unravel his fingers as they had seized up during the night with arthritis. I could see he was in pain but he never complained. He tried to keep the stove alight all night but sometimes I would enter a freezing kitchen to find him sound asleep on his couch.

I would do little jobs for him in my spare time. There was the vegetable patch to weed, wood to cut, yard to sweep and always the dirty pots to scrub. Mostly he reused the same pots, but they became hard baked and the coating went a shade of green. In his back shed, he

had two beautiful old Overland cars. They were genuine antiques from a bygone era. One was a utility with a soft top. The unmarked sedan had plush leather seats, a splendid canvass top and a big shinny hickory steering wheel. The old man promised to take me for a spin in the sedan one Sunday.

Evidently the old man had been boasting about my stews. One Sunday, the neighbours leant over the side fence and handed me a casserole dish with a lid on it. They wanted to sample my stew. I told them that it tasted much better by Wednesday but they insisted on trying the new batch. It worked out well as they came back with a tray of cakes, which was a treat for both of us.

Once again I was faced with a bathing problem. When the old man had his weekly bath whether he needed it or not, he had to fill his biggest kettle which, when hot, he had to carry to his bathroom. The old tin bath with its coating of scum was his only way to cleanliness. But it didn't appeal to me. I had to find a more suitable method for keeping clean.

Between baths, the old man half filled a dish similar to a miners' pan, from the outside tank. He washed, shaved, and then washed his underwear in the same water, then poured it on the garden. That would explain

why the carrots were so big! It was easy to overlook his primitive hygiene when he got into his story-telling moods. The stories of his gold-mining days kept me captivated for hours.

He was born in the gold fields on the outskirts of what is now the city of Stawell. He grew up among mining families, experiencing their hardships, privation and even starvation. For some, gold mining was a ticket to wealth but to most, it was a road to destitution. He knew what it was like to be hungry and to feel the deep discouragement that had plagued his dad. He and his siblings had watched their mum tearfully pleading with their dad to give up, and get a paying job.

Eventually the family moved out of the diggings to the nearby town, where the old man's dad got a job driving one of the first trucks that carried freight from Melbourne to the local general store. It became clear that it was the traders, the storekeepers, the publicans and the gold buyers who were getting rich. Most of the miners either drank their earnings or squandered their hard earned money on gambling. While the old man spent most of his life in and around the gold mining area, he never caught the gold fever. He worked at jobs that provided him with a regular income.

By now, it was getting cold and wet. I was still out on the first door by nine o'clock but spent a lot of time standing on verandahs and under trees waiting for the rain to ease. It was always a great feeling to ride into the old man's yard, leave the bike in the shed and get in out of the wet. I always had a contribution for the stew and enjoyed standing by the hot stove while the aroma stirred my appetite. Apart from the cold and my rough sleeping quarters, my constant concern was a decent place to bathe. I really longed for a good, hot shower.

Each day, as I turned into the lane that ran past the back of the old man's property, I passed a noisy hotel on the corner where the lane met with the main street. One cold miserable day, as I turned into the lane, an idea hit me like a wet sock in the face. Maybe the publican would let me pay for a shower, two or three times a week. I skidded to a stop, leant my bike against the side of the hotel and went inside.

I had never been inside a hotel before. I was quite amazed at what I saw. There were rough looking people, sitting at the bar, all talking at once. Then there were more rowdy types sitting at tables with huge glasses of brown liquid in front of them. There were people playing darts and in a nearby room a group of men were playing snooker. I just stood and stared until the man

behind the bar called out and asked what I wanted.

I went over and asked if I could speak to the manager. In response, he pointed to a pot- bellied tough looking character standing talking to a noisy bunch of card playing men who had obviously just knocked off work. He wasn't too pleased to be interrupted but agreed to have a private conversation. When I asked if I could pay for the use of his bathroom due to my humble accommodation, he replied that the hotel bathroom was for guests only, and turned on his heals leaving me standing in the middle of the room feeling foolish and humiliated.

As I walked down the lane to collect my bike, I passed a side door that I discovered was unlocked. On further investigation, I found myself standing in a hallway, which lead to the bar area. It also passed a dinning room and lead to a set of stairs. At the top of the stairs, I located the bathroom. There were three showers, a bath, toilet cubicles and numerous washbasins. It was clean but had an unused look about it.

That night I had a wonderful hot shower. They even provided the soap so all I needed was a towel. Over the next few weeks, I was a very satisfied regular customer! I promised myself that I would make a financial

contribution to the costs of running the hotel, the day before I rode off into the sunset. I can't remember if I did or not.

CHAPTER TEN

"Truth was unpopular in Christ's day. It is unpopular in our day. It has been unpopular ever since Satan first gave man a disrelish for it by presenting fables that lead to self-exaltation" DA p242.

For some strange reason, there developed a stronger than usual resistance to my books. More people were unwilling to purchase or give orders for the 'Desire of Ages'. Most people wouldn't even let me demonstrate my wares, let alone complete my canvass. There were more nasty people in the area where I was working than I had encountered before. One rude lady said she had heard about me and my religious books and was not interested. She slammed the door so hard the bell rang.

So that was the problem. Someone was spreading some negative reports around, without bothering to investigate what it was that I was selling. Maybe a clergyman had seen a set in a house while on his rounds or a husband was angry because his wife had made a purchase. Whatever the reason, someone was actively

poisoning the minds of potential customers. It was time to study my territory map.

It is wonderful how God directs our lives and solves our problems. The next Sunday, the stew tasting neighbours called out for another sample. During the conversation, they asked how my canvassing was going, so I shared my frustration over the negative publicity I was getting. They agreed that I needed a change of scenery and suggested that I work the Hall's Gap area. It was in my territory but quite a long bike ride away.

Then they announced they had a solution. They had some time off the next week and were planning to visit Hall's Gap. They suggested taking me and leaving me to do my thing, while they explored some of the walks around the Grampians. It was a great idea, which would give me a break from town canvassing and let things quieten down. The troublemakers would think I had given up and moved off to another town.

The young couple had recently purchased a second-hand A-model Ford. It had a shiny black canvas top, soft leather seats, sparkling, chrome headlights, a rack at the back and spoke wheels. It was a beauty. I was so excited about getting a ride in this exquisite example of man's craftsmanship. The next week was one of the

most enjoyable I had experienced in a long time. My friends even drove me around some of the small country towns and called in on some of the farms. To top it all off, they refused to accept payment for the petrol.

The old man was getting tired of my excitement by the end of the week. But he was aroused by the way I reported on the performance of the A-model Ford. So much so, that he announced his intentions to take me out in his Overlander car. The next Sunday, we would go out into the country for some rabbit shooting.

This was before myxomatosis hit the countryside. The area around Stawell was crawling with rabbits. They were in plague proportions and moving over the land like a huge flock of sheep. In some areas the grass had all gone and the rabbits were digging up the grass roots. As a result, there was serious soil erosion that caused deep gutters where the rain had washed away the topsoil, leaving paddocks looking like mini canyons. These 'trenches' were handy for rabbit shooting.

When asked what we would use for guns, the old man chuckled and promised to give me a big surprise. I couldn't wait for Sunday to arrive. When it did, I was up early as usual, due to the cold. The old man was up early too, which was a surprise. He was shuffling about

getting his breakfast when I entered the warm kitchen. That kitchen was the most comfortable, homely room I had ever enjoyed. It had a special atmosphere that was relaxing and secluded from the world.

By the time I had finished my breakfast, the old man had piled up a variety of mysterious pouches, ornate boxes and things wrapped in old rags, on one side of the table. Then with a smug look on his face, he went into the lounge room and returned with a long box, which he placed on the table. After repeating the procedure, he opened the first box and retrieved the most amazing gun I had ever seen. He explained that it was a single barrelled, muzzle-loading shotgun. It was a museum piece of great beauty. The carved butt was a thing to behold, with a mother-of-pearl inlay of deer jumping over logs.

The second box contained his pride and joy. His eyes glistened as he unwrapped a double-barrelled muzzle-loading shotgun. The two weapons must have been worth a fortune. This too was carved with animals, and cleverly inlaid. He nearly blew me away when he announced we would use these guns to shoot rabbits. Surely they were for shooting game or wild bears, not common old rabbits. But who was I to dampen his enthusiasm? He had a hunter's gleam in his eye.

The first task was to load these two antiques. He explained the technique as he went about the laborious process. It was not simple, like loading a rifle with bullets. There was a cap, gunpowder, shot and a ramrod. I watched with fascination as he went about the loading procedure. I understood why Davy Crocket had so many adventures between each rifle load. Once you fired a shot, you would have to run for cover or you would be shot while re-loading.

When the two weapons were loaded and ready, we went out to the shed to his next museum item. We pushed the Overlander car out into the middle of the yard and loaded up our gear. It was my job to crank the engine into life. The old man explained how to hold the crank handle so it wouldn't break my wrist if it backfired. He then climbed into the driver's seat, fiddled with the controls and gave me the nod. After the sixth back breaking cranks, the old machine roared into life which was quite remarkable considering the length of time it had sat in the shed growing spider's webs.

We couldn't have chosen a more beautiful day. There was a cloudless sky, a gentle breeze and all nature seemed anxious to make itself known. The grey gums were sprinkled with pink Galahs while the flocks of noisy white Cockatoos chattered and screeched away

as though they were attending a Country Women's Association board meeting. There were a few kangaroos relaxing in the shade with little concern for the hundreds of rabbits hopping about busily devouring what was left of the grass.

We both enjoyed being out in the open country, chugging along a back road, winding its merry way through what used to be prosperous sheep country. Instead of green scenery, it was a brown, bruised looking picture of devastation. There were no sheep to be seen, as their pastures had been stolen by hungry, multiplying rabbits. For this reason, we had no conscience troubling us over our intentions.

We found a suitable ditch that was deep enough to walk along without being seen by the rabbits. The old man carried his precious double barrel shot gun, while I carried the single. We crept along until we came to a good place where the ground sloped up to the steep side of the ditch. When we peeped over the edge of our trench, we were delighted to see a clutch of about fifteen rabbits within easy range. The old man got excited and muttered about bagging at least five or six with just one barrel.

He eased the heavy gun up onto ground level, pointed

it in the general direction of the unsuspecting rabbits and in his excitement pressed both triggers. There was a huge explosion, which knocked the old man flat on his back on the floor of the ditch. As soon as I was satisfied he was uninjured, I checked to see how many rabbits I had to go and collect.

To my amazement, there wasn't a rabbit in sight. Either he had aimed too high or they out-ran the shot. As far as I could see, they had all gone underground. The old man was so disappointed and annoyed with himself. It was a disaster with so many rabbits in circulation and we had to go home empty-handed. As we were about to load the guns into the car, I looked through the trees that lined the other side of the road and noticed lots of rabbits happily gobbling what was left of the grass roots. Evidently the roar of the gun had not reached them.

I crept through the trees, right up to the wire fence without disturbing the half dozed rabbits grazing close to their warren. Then I made a bad mistake. I rested the barrel of the shotgun on the top wire of the fence instead of the post. Without suspecting what was about to happen, I lined up my target and pulled the trigger. There was another peace-shattering explosion and I was flat on my back with the gun lying across my chest. The wire had acted like a spring, shooting the barrel up in

the air and sending me crashing over backwards.

When I got to my feet, I discovered three dead bunnies lying close to their warren. Every other rabbit for miles around had vanished. There was a deathly silence as though all nature seemed too scared to make a sound. The old man couldn't believe his eyes when I turned up with three rabbits. All the way home he went over the ingredients of the recipe he had in mind for his rabbit stew.

As we relished the pleasant drive home, he launched into a reminiscing mood. He took me back to his youthful days when he lived on the diggings. He talked about the struggles the gold miners endured, living in tents that were unbearably hot in the summer and freezing cold in the winter. The drinking-water was carried in by horse and cart but the water for washing and cooking was dirty and in short supply. There were food shortages due to distance so most of the miners ate rabbits, kangaroos, goannas, and the occasional sheep.

I was interested to learn it was the Chinese who introduced vegetables to the miners and their families. There was a lot of illness in those days that took a big toll on the population. The Europeans noticed the

Asians seemed immune to much of the sickness. They came to realize the value of taking time out to grow vegetables. A more balanced diet improved the general health of the early miners. Some of the Asians, who were not so lucky with prospecting, turned to market gardening and got rich saving lives by providing healthy greens and a variety of other nourishing vegetables.

That evening, the old man and I stood side-by-side making our respective stews. He did his best to persuade me to add some rabbit meat to my mixture but I was not tempted. That night we teased each other over how delicious our stews tasted. The next day when I returned home with some new ingredients for my stew, the old man had a strange look on his face. I knew he was trying to hide something but I pretended not to notice. After our dinner, as we relaxed by the warm stove, listening to the radio, he inquired if I enjoyed my stew. When I emphasized how delicious it had been - the best ever, he explained that it should have been, as he had put half a rabbit in it!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"To all who are reaching out to feel the guiding hand of God, the moment of greatest discouragement is the time when divine help is nearest. They will look back with thankfulness upon the darkest part of their way. 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly.' 2 Peter 2:9. From every temptation and every trial He will bring them forth with firmer faith and a richer experience" DA p529.

In spite of the winter conditions, I was now writing up a healthy number of orders. The high percentage of deliveries meant my bank account gave me a lot of satisfaction. I was also enjoying the companionship of the old man. But I was struggling with loneliness. I was missing two important influences. There was no church fellowship and I craved the company of young people. Even though I was getting well-known in and around Stawell, there were no young people I could relate to. There were sporting activities but they were all held on Saturday and Stawell died on Sunday.

Sabbaths were quite miserable. I couldn't even sleep in, as the caravan was so cold and the bed so uncomfortable. The old man loved to listen to the races on his radio so his warm kitchen was no longer a haven from the cold. I usually dressed in my warmest cloths and rode around on my bike. By now I knew all the bush tracks, back roads and country lanes but these were out of the question when it was raining. I really got to dread the Sabbaths and this worried me, as I wanted to enjoy them. The nearest church was Horsham but it was a long way away and transport was scarce over the weekends. My only comfort was the fact that I was nearing the end of my time in Stawell.

The Publishing Directors were quite amazed to learn I would soon need a new territory. They sent a supervisor up to see if I was faithfully covering the territory I had been assigned. He agreed to accompany me for one day on the doors. Though not full of praise, he admitted I had developed an effective technique, which was getting good results. He went away convinced I was conscientiously covering the area and would soon need to be relocated.

I was praying that they would send me to a town where there was a church. I needed a place to worship and people with whom I could share my joys and sorrows. I

desperately needed fellowship with people my own age. The supervisor went back to his office with all this clearly in mind. So I was getting excited as I anticipated a new environment in which to enjoy my colporteur ministry.

A few days later, a letter arrived from the office with a new territory map accompanied by a short note stating their satisfaction with my performance and wishing me the Lord's blessing as I moved to the city of Ararat. I would have to get myself there but they had contacted a lady whose name was on the Conference roll, and was willing to provide accommodation.

Ararat was not far away. It was a larger town, on the road to Melbourne. The old man warned me that it was colder than Stawell. They even get snow during the winter months with icy winds that penetrate winter woollies. He feared for my health but so far my asthma had not been a problem. The Lord had protected me from the cold, the rain and the winds. Maybe Ararat would add snow to the list.

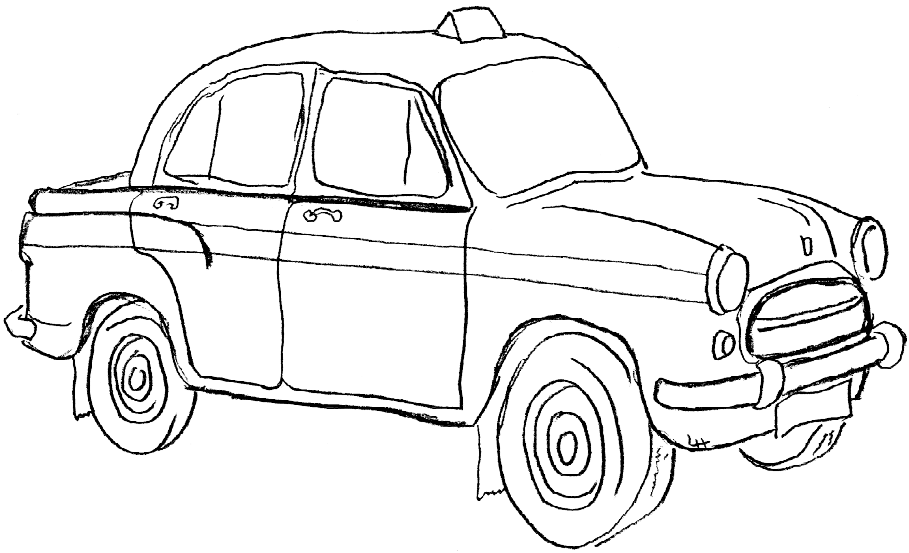
The future prospects gave me a new lease of life as I put in long days in an effort to complete the section of town still waiting to be visited with spiritual encouragement. My reputation had spread far and wide

so it was not unusual to have people either smile or frown when they opened the door. Their first comment was usually to say that they had heard about me and about my books. I would quickly respond by suggesting that this was their opportunity to satisfy their curiosity.

One of my techniques was to try and find a way to make the potential customer laugh even if it was at my own expense. Now that people were talking about me, I had to change my approach to counteract their preconceived ideas. One way was to start my canvass by stating that I was the salesman they had heard about and these were the popular books everyone was excited over. It was true that there was quite a deal of excitement. Some were excited by their anger, while others were excited by their purchase, then there were those who were excited about how to get rid of me. It was all exciting.

One lady informed me she had been warned by her Vicar not to buy my books. In fact he had mentioned me from his pulpit. She was curious as to what type of books I was peddling. As a result of my canvass, she was happy to give me an order. I had called on one clergyman to let him know what I was doing and the kind of books I was selling, but that was a mistake I would never repeat.

It was a sad day when I had to say farewell to my few friends and especially the old man. He had been like a father to me with his encouragement and help, to get me going on wet, cold mornings. His wisdom was boundless, as were his human insights. His fascinating stories of days long past entertained me when I could have been bored out of my brain on cold, wet nights. He had taught me so much about the mining days with their hardships, dramas and rewards. Now he was about to become part of my history.



CHAPTER TWELVE

"He took our nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome" DA p.311.

The train ride to Ararat was a pleasant trip through undulating hills dotted with sheep scouring for a meal. The picturesque country continued on into the distance with vast plains sprinkled with clusters of hills and an occasional range of rocky ridges. This was different to the country around Stawell. The territory map indicated that my new area was much larger with a scattered collection of small country towns and vast areas of sheep country where the farms were long distances apart. I wondered how I was expected to cover my new territory on a pushbike.

I left my bike at the train station and took a taxi to my new place of abode. The lady was another widow. She had two sons and a few borders. I would have to share a room with an iterant sheep station roustabout. It all sounded quite intriguing. The taxi driver had some interesting insights into the people I would be staying with. Evidently the youngest son was a bit of a larrikin

who roared around town on a Golden Flash motorbike. He worked, but was not averse to spending his mother's money.

It appeared that my new adventure would be quite different from anything I had experienced before. Certainly the house was the most unusual dwelling I had ever seen. The taxi man laughed at my comments and assured me the inhabitants were even more unique. I rang the bell with trepidation. Nothing happened so I tried again. Surely it wasn't one of *those doorbells*. It was, so I banged on the glass panel. As I waited I studied the mess that was the front yard. In the centre, an ornate fountain hid under a tangle of long grass and some out-of-control roses. Grass grew in and around the pavers that looked like second-hand bricks. The front fence was in serious need of painting and the nondescript shrubs were sad and neglected.

My observations were interrupted by the partial opening of the door. A weary voice asked what I wanted. I couldn't see the source of the faint enquiry but the musty smell caused me to hesitate. Before I could explain, the door opened a fraction wider and I glimpsed a smallish lady in a dressing gown. I quickly identified myself as her new boarder. She responded by opening the door just wide enough for me to enter.

It took a while for my eyes to adjust to the gloom and discovered that I was standing in the lounge room. It looked more like an auction house with an auction about to begin. I had never seen so much stuff. It looked like cheap prizes from a sideshow. The clutter was spread over every piece of furniture with a flat surface. There were china dogs, cats, horses, children wearing brightly coloured clothes and a variety of mugs from all over the world.

China cabinets were packed with china. There were all kinds of porcelain objects: vases, souvenir plates, cake stands, jug and glass water sets and many other objects I couldn't describe. Each cabinet had a mirror reflecting and multiplying the clutter. It was an Aladdin's cave or a junkyard, depending on how you viewed the collection.

The tired-looking widow explained that she was not an early riser. She then led the way to the back section of the house where my small room was waiting. There were two single beds, a small table and two antique wardrobes. I was relieved to see a double bar heater attached to the wall. Well-worn mats partially covered the floor.

The widow said I could join her for lunch and left me

to settle in. The house itself was cold and dingy. But it is the occupants who can warm an environment, so I was impatient to meet my roommate and the two sons. I discovered the shed in the backyard, was occupied by a family of immigrants from the Baltic region. Refugees were still moving to Australia as a result of the Second World War and many employers and landlords exploited them.

The widow had managed to tidy herself up for our lunch together. It was a simple meal but very welcome. She explained that there was no Adventist church in Ararat and that she was the only church member and not a very good one. Her sons were not Christians but good boys who loved her and helped her to survive. It didn't look like they were gardeners or very handy with a lawnmower but she only had good things to say about them.

That evening, the youngest son, whom everyone called Sonny, roared into the backyard on his shiny Golden Flash. It was well named. I had never seen a more powerful-looking machine in all my life. After we had introduced ourselves, he pointed to his pride and joy and explained its virtues until I was overwhelmed. Sonny was a thick-set youth about my own age, with blond hair, a contagious smile and a relaxed attitude to

life.

As there was an hour before dinner, he suggested we go for a burn. He wanted me to experience the excitement of a powerful motorbike. Everything he did, he did fast. He leaned the beast over as we sped around the corners. He accelerated on the level stretches and screamed to a jarring halt at the stop signs. Hanging on like a koala bear I was wishing I had a leather jacket.

He took off from the stop sign as though competing with an invisible Ferrari. After half-an-hour of reckless performing, I was glad to alight and hurry into the warmth of the kitchen. I was shaking so much I could hardly stand. It was hard to decide whether my shakes were from the cold or the ride.

My roommate was out-of-town working on a sheep station, so I had the room all to myself for now. However, Sonny wasn't about to allow me much free time. He insisted we go up town to meet some of his friends. Evidently he had told them about my impending arrival. They were keen to meet an eighteen-year-old door-to-door salesman. We pulled up in front of a motorbike shop where a group of guys and gals were lounging about in various styles of motorbike gear.

Sonny introduced me as his new friend. It wasn't going to be hard for them to remember my name but I soon forgot theirs. They were friendly enough but not my type of companions. It was going to be tricky, avoiding Sonny's obvious intentions to integrate me into his group. They would probably turn their noses up once they discovered that I rode a pushbike. Then there was the matter of the product I was selling.

The widow was pleased I would buy my own lunch and she would only have to organize the evening meal. I would help myself to the breakfast foods in the cupboard and the fridge. I was keen to get out and explore the city, so toast and a hot cup of Milo would do for the first meal of the day.

It really was quite a large city. The office people thought it would keep me busy for the rest of the year. Only time would tell. As I rode around the suburbs, I noticed some pleasant looking parks and the usual upper and lower classes of society. There was the older part of town, plus a larger newer section of modern houses, plenty to keep me busy. A huge Cathedral dominated, with its accompanying church buildings, schools and secluded monasteries hidden behind high brick walls.

It didn't look a religious town but one church was very well represented. I would have to change my canvass to accommodate a strong appreciation for the Virgin Mary for a large percentage of the population. My guess was that the poorer section of town would be more secular. This would probably be my most fruitful field for sales. My only real worry was the coming of the coldest part of winter. My navy-blue overcoat would get plenty of work over the next few months.

I soon got into a routine, balancing work, home life and play. Sonny had borrowed a leather jacket so our exploits were a lot more comfortable. He was keen to show me the sights in and around Ararat, including some hairy trips into the country. We sped by many attractions so fast they were just a blur. We were cementing a sound friendship that was good for both of us.

It turned out that we were both lonely, as many of his so-called friends were jealous of his new motorbike. A 650cc Golden Flash was one of the best you could buy in those days so there weren't many bikies who could compete. I realized that if you want to lose your friends, all you have to do is out-do them.

The first disruption to my life-style was the arrival of

my intoxicated roommate. Fortunately, he was not the violent type. He just made a nuisance of himself. However, Sonny was embarrassed by his condition and wanted to give him a hiding. I intervened but when I was returning from the shower, Sonny was in the process of roughing him up. The poor drunk was telling him to hit him harder so that he could go to sleep. It was the widow who broke up the disturbance and sent Sonny off to his room.

After dinner, Sonny again invited me to accompany him for a ride into town. He wanted to shout me a milk shake at his favourite milkbar. It was a popular hang out for a different group of young people. A family of friendly Greeks ran the café. They welcomed me in their usual friendly manner and plopped in extra scoop of ice cream to thicken up my chocolate milk shake. The young people were pleased to meet me and hoped I would enjoy living in Ararat.

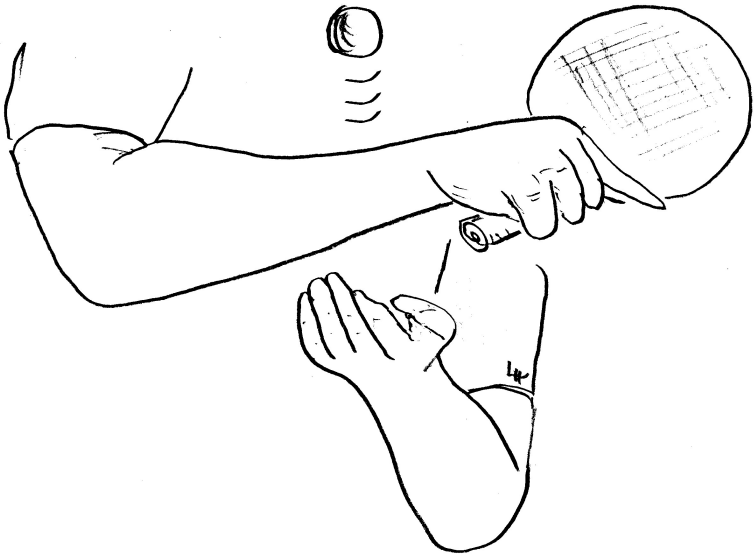
One young chap by the name of Tom wanted to know if I played table tennis. I had learnt to play at college so he invited me to join his club. They met on Tuesdays and Thursdays around seven o'clock. It sounded good to me as I was still emerging from my bout of loneliness. Sonny thought it was a sissy game and a waste of a good evening but I managed to calm him down and

point out that this was what he wanted. He agreed it was important for me to make friends, but playing table tennis was not his idea of exciting recreation.

The club president was a decent type, who put me through my paces and appointed me to the upper C-grade with the chance to move up to the lower B-grade if I improved before the inter-club competitions got started. I was pleasantly surprised at the type of young people who enjoyed their games. The competition was very much alive but it was all very friendly. My circle of new friends increased as we teamed up for games and relaxed around the refreshment bar.

The days and nights were getting colder as the winter set in. My room was very cold in spite of the little heater and I was in need of more blankets. When I asked if there were any available, the widow complained that I was expecting too much as it was. She complained that I was not paying enough board and she was tired of catering for all us hungry men.

A solution came when my roommate went off to another job. I quickly added his blankets to my bedding and threw on his eiderdown. When I came home from work, the eiderdown was missing. At least I still had the blankets.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"All who are consecrated to God will be channels of light. God makes them His agents to communicate to others the riches of His grace" DA p141.

Ararat was a clean, tidy city. It was well laid out, with no steep hills, lots of shady trees and plenty of flower gardens. It was a colporteur's dream as long as the winter proved bearable and my health stood up to the wet and cold. I had struggled with the better side of town where the people were attached to their churches but strangely, not interested in reading about the life of Christ. It was time for a change. Maybe the un-churched would be more approachable.

As I worked my way up and down the streets of very ordinary houses, I found the people much easier to canvass and more interested in religious books. The orders began to multiply as I kept up the hours. There weren't many cash sales but I was selling a lot of 'helps' which paid my board and kept me in pocket-money.

The situation at the widow's boarding house was

getting complicated. The older son had turned up with his Triumph motorbike, creating an unpleasant level of competition. There were heated arguments over bikes and the amount of support their mother was sharing out. Evidently the older son had been sacked from his job in Melbourne and was looking for work. He seemed to resent my presence even though I was the only paying member of the household.

I decided to seek alternative accommodation. Some of the members of the table tennis club were boarding with relatives or at various boarding houses. They explained that accommodation was scarce but one guy suggested I try the Ararat Hotel, one of the few hotels in town that took boarders. There was one room available with two single beds but I could have the room to myself if I was prepared to share if there was a need. The board was about the same as the widows, but the conditions were far superior. The room was warmer, larger and cleaner. The meal arrangements would be similar, only there would be a special roast dinner on Sundays.

Sonny was sorry to see me go but understood my situation. The widow was rather annoyed but indicated it was probably for the best. It was my bosses who made the biggest fuss. When I forwarded my new address,

they responded by stating that it was not policy for colporteurs to stay in hotels. They hoped that I would look for more appropriate accommodation. I assured them if and when more suitable board turned up, I would take it.

A few days after I had settled into my new home away from home, the winter turned ugly. Cold rain came pelting down with occasional sleet that forced me to buy gloves and a hat. It took a powerful amount of courage to venture out on such days. However, once I reached the area where I was working, the weather proved an advantage. The people were sorry for me as I stood on their verandahs, shivering and wet, so they invited me inside. Once inside, I was half way to a sale.

When householders saw me standing on their doorstep covered in snow, they invited me in without even bothering to find out why I was calling. After a hot drink and a quick explanation, it was down to business. My sales increased as the weather deteriorated. The worst part was the ride back to the hotel. The publican thought I was crazy to go out in such miserable weather. But when I reminded him that this was how I earned my board, he gave up scolding me.

Of necessity, I had put my vegetarianism on hold, as

the hotel menu didn't cater for special needs. The meals were really quite delicious and the best I had enjoyed for many months. It was providential that I was eating nourishing food with the winter so severe. The locals were all complaining about what was the coldest winter for many years. It was not pushbike weather, that's for sure.

My circle of friends was increasing as I shared my evenings between the table tennis group, and the milkbar set who had turned the café into a social centre. It was a place to enjoy a fun evening away from boarding institutions and unhappy home environments. One of the active members of the group brought his sister along to meet me. He felt that we were right for each other. She certainly was a lovely girl with a great sense of humour. We became good friends and went out together when the weather permitted.

Sabbaths were still a problem. Where to go and what to do, was a constant dilemma. Mostly, I stayed in my room and read. When the weather improved, I went out and about. The most embarrassing situations were invitations to attend sporting events, going on picnics, bus excursions and social outings. My new girlfriend was willing to stroll in the park but couldn't understand why I refused to go to the pictures or the football.

I had to find a way to get to a church where I could fellowship with people who understood my predicament. I found out where the closest church was, was: in a large city, half way to Melbourne. So the next Sabbath, I rose early, skipped breakfast and walked through town, until I reached the highway heading south. Previously I had done a lot of hitch hiking with great success. In those days it was easy to get a ride if you looked respectable, looked like you knew where you were going and had a big smile on your face.

A kind motorist delivered me to the door of the church and thanked me for the inspirational conversation we had enjoyed. The church was still closed so, shivering from the cold, I sat on the brick fence. Suddenly the door opened from the inside so I made a dash for the shelter and the friendship I felt sure awaited me. The deacon had disappeared so I selected a seat I hoped wasn't someone's special possie.

The congregation began to enter in from a side door so I presumed that the car park was out the back. They moved to their regular seats where there were cushions, feet warmers and Bibles. They must have had spare Bibles at home I thought. There were wall heaters that were doing a great job of warming the high cathedral shaped space above. There seemed to be little benefit

as far as my freezing feet were concerned.

It was the normal Sabbath School and when they went into small groups for the lesson study, I hoped to get acquainted. However, apart from the curt nod from the teacher, I was ignored. The fact that I didn't have a lesson book didn't go over too well but fortunately the teacher wasn't the questioning type. During the break before the preaching service, some members went into huddles for a chat but most just sat quietly reading the 'Record'.

There were very few youth, and those who were present seemed to be enjoying each other's company. The Pastor moved around the congregation shaking hands, smiling and nodding with obvious pleasure at being their spiritual leader. He even came over to shake my hand but was not interested in conversation. I was beginning to feel out-of-place and sad as I was longing to be warmly welcomed into a spiritual family.

When the service ended, the Pastor walked to the side door to shake hands but no one went out the front door. They all turned around and headed for the side door. I loitered, hoping that someone would see the dejected look on my face and invite me home for a good vegetarian lunch. The pastor shook my hand and turned quickly to the person behind me who wanted to

comment on the sermon. As I was a pedestrian, I exited through the front door where a frigid cold wind tried to go straight through me.

Sitting on the front fence until the last car had exited the car park, I headed for the highway. I hardly felt the cold, as my empty stomach was busy reminding me that it needed attention. The rides were few and far between but eventually a farmer stopped to offer me a lift. Normally, I would have refused, as short rides can prove unsatisfactory but it was starting to sprinkle a cold rain so I climbed into his truck cabin where it was warm and dry.

We had a lively conversation until he turned off the highway and stopped to let me off. He wished me all the best and drove off down a paved road. It wasn't until later that I realized how much I needed his best wishes. The drizzle had intensified as it came at me like needles driven by the cold wind. It was horizontal rain that seemed determined to make my life as miserable as possible.

For some reason, no one was willing to give me a ride. I waved, smiled, thumbed, shouted and cried as the vehicles sped past. After about an hour, a truckie stopped well down the road so that he could watch me

as I approached. When he was satisfied that I was harmless, he invited me to climb aboard. He asked how long I had been trying to get a ride and why I was standing near the turn off to the Lang Lang boy's reformatory! I hadn't noticed the big signboard announcing the institution. It explained a lot.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"We should not present our petitions to God to prove whether He will fulfill his word, but because He will fulfill it; not to prove that He loves us, but because He loves us" DA p126.

It was time for my first big delivery. The Melbourne office sent my order by train so I had to get a taxi to transport the boxes of books to the shed at the rear of the hotel where the proprietor had set aside a space for my bike and books. The taxi driver was an interesting chap who had lived in the district all his life. He knew all the hot gossip in Ararat. He knew who the movers and shakers were and which religious groups lived in the different parts of town.

He was fascinated to learn that a teenager was selling religious books from door to door. He was even more amazed that I was doing it all by pushbike. He had been a salesman for quite a few years and knew all about the ups and downs of selling. He had sold vacuum cleaners, farm machinery and motorcars. You name it - he had sold it.

He wanted to know how I was planning to deliver my orders on my pushbike. I explained that it was with much difficulty. It took days to do what could be done in a few hours. I had asked many times if a man from Melbourne could drive up and give me a hand but they were always very busy. Then to my surprise, the taxi driver came up with a suggestion. If I organized my delivery to cover the area in an easy to follow way, he would work on a flat rate of so much per hour rather than by distance.

We agreed on the day I had selected for the deliveries, and then we worked out the cost that was very reasonable and went our separate ways. I prepared a list of names and addresses in a sequence according to the streets, sorted the books as to the choice of colours and got myself ready for the big day.

We met at the shed where the taxi driver helped me carry the boxes of books to the back seat. I gave him the list and off we went. By lunchtime we had delivered all the books and stopped off at a milkbar to celebrate. My new friend was full of praise but he was also quite amazed over my success in one particular section of the city. He mentioned one street where I had sold a lot of books and asked if I knew that I had been working in the red light area.

He mentioned one house in particular where I had sold two sets to the ladies who were very interested in buying books for their children. This house was very familiar to him as a taxi driver, because he delivered men to that address at all times of the day and night. He teased that I could sell a refrigerator to an Eskimo. But I knew Who was accompanying me as I went from door to door.

A few days later, as I rode past the taxi rank, he called out and invited me to sit in his cab while he put a proposition to me. He had been thinking about how I was going to canvass all the farmers between Ararat and Lake Bolac in the south. He pointed out that it was impractical to work the area on a pushbike. I admitted I hadn't thought much about it. But now he mentioned it, I had no idea how I would manage the vast area bordered by the Grampians and stretching all the way east to Beaufort. It was a huge tract of untouched territory.

In his opinion, the territory was too good to miss. Evidently the farmers had enjoyed a couple of good years and wool was still fetching a high price. Even though the rabbits were causing havoc, there was good grass and the rabbiters were doing well selling their pelts and the farmers received a share of this money.

There was another reason why my taxi driver friend felt this area would be worthwhile canvassing. He explained most of the people were either Presbyterians, Catholics or as he put it, Callithumpians. It was not an area frequented by salesmen, and certainly not by religious-book salesmen. We had the added advantage of his knowledge of the area and the people. He had sold them farm machinery, stayed in their homes and worked on their properties. He knew their names, their religion, their children and even their outlook on life.

When I asked where this conversation was going, he outlined a plan he had been cooking up. It would take some faith on my part but after seeing where I had sold books in town, he was confident that we could make a success selling in the country. He would work on a flat rate and I would have to sell for cash, as there was no going back for deliveries. He was prepared to set aside a week for this exercise. It was the chance of a lifetime so I agreed to his proposition.

My faith was to prove inadequate for such a radical venture. I was hesitant to place too large an order with the Melbourne office. I had a few sets on hand so I ordered thirty sets to be sent up on the train for the next week. My friend was disappointed in the size of my faith but I just couldn't imagine selling more than five

or six sets for cash in one day.

The books arrived in good time, and as we were collecting the boxes we made plans for the following Monday. That weekend I was beside myself with excitement. But there was also a feeling of trepidation. It would be wonderful to put the 'Desire of Ages' into the homes of these country people but it would be a costly exercise if they refused to accept them. There was a lot at stake here. I needed a special blessing from the Lord, a host of angels, and all the skill I could muster.

On Monday morning we set off with ten sets on the back seat. My friend suggested time would not permit me to canvass with my prospectus. It would be quicker and better if I carried a wrapped set under my arm. Then at the appropriate moment, start tearing off the paper as I explained the purpose of my visit. Then I would hand him or her the first volume while I continued with my canvass. My main thrust was to explain the benefits of the books as a substitute for Sunday School. If the person was a Sunday School teacher, the books would serve as text books to make his or her teaching more meaningful. As I already knew her name, I would explain the benefits of having good Christian books in the home for the whole family.

During the canvass, my friend suggested that I enquire after her husband and naming the children, enquire as to their health. I was to make her feel I was doing her a favour by coming all the way by taxi to give her the opportunity to obtain such wonderful books. Then I would ask if she would like to pay by cash or cheque. It worked so well, by three o'clock in the afternoon, we had sold out.

As we were pushed for time, we could afford to be selective. We sped past quite a few letterboxes with Irish names or with long driveways that my friend assessed as poor prospects. He felt it was better to pick the eyes out of the district than not to work it at all. It was very likely that the territory had never been canvassed before so I was excited with the results.

We sold ten more sets on both Tuesday and Wednesday. I had six sets left so on Thursday we only worked for half the day. I would never have imagined I could sell thirty-six sets in one week and for cash. We could have done better if my faith had been stronger. My hands were shaking as I filled out my weekly report for the office. Surely this would be some sort of a record, I thought. I could imagine the people in the office jumping for joy.

When the reply came it totally deflated me. There was no expression of joy at my success, but a comment that it was not policy for colporteurs to use taxis in order to cover their territories! Obviously, it was not a good idea to let the people in Melbourne know more than was necessary. I was working for God, after all, not men.

This year of working my way through the 'University of Hard Knocks,' was helping me to move from boyhood to manhood. The Lord was teaching me to depend on Him, rather than on people. I was on my own, out in the world doing one of the hardest jobs possible. But in my loneliness, I was exposed to Satan's temptations.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"When assailed by temptation, look not to circumstances or to the weakness of self, but to the power of the word. All it's strength yours" DA p123.

Most of my free evenings were spent at the Greek milkbar where my new group of friends gossiped, joked, devoured banana splits, fruit salad sundaes and monster milk shakes. It was a fun time that gave me some release after a day of canvassing with its stress and constant pressure. Everyone wanted the few hours to be light-hearted and relaxing. There was a lot of leg pulling, which made sure we were all down-to-earth and on the same level.

They were a decent bunch with high ideals and a desire to make something of themselves. There were bank clerks, shop assistants, apprentices, tech students and junior accountants, plus others of the same type. None of them smoked or drank alcohol, while drugs had not been invented, so they were a clean living group of fun-loving youth.

One evening the lad,who had introduced me to the table tennis club, took me aside for a private conversation. His name was Tom and we had become quite good friends. The point of his concern centred on my occupation. He realized that I would eventually run out of territory and leave. He wanted me to stay in Ararat, get a good job, get married, settle down and become part of their lives as a good citizen of this fine city.

They all looked down on my occupation as a poor man's way to make a living. They considered door-to-door salesmen as conmen, liars and fly-by-night agents. They all felt that it was beneath me to be going out on a pushbike, knocking on doors in all kinds of weather, fighting off dogs, angry people and living in hotels. Feeling sorry for me, they wanted me to draw closer into their circle and become more normal.

Appreciating their concern, I avoided saying or do anything that would shatter their opinion of me, or my occupation. I knew some of their parents had complained about me. Not everyone appreciated my visits to their homes. A salesman of religious books is probably at the bottom rung in the world of canvassers. The word had got around that a Seventh-day Adventist was pushing his views via religious books on the life

of Christ.

My work in Ararat was getting harder as the negative talk spread from group to group. Church-goers and anti-religious members of the population resented my activity in their community. I had sold well amongst the poorer class but as I moved into the better class suburbs, I met a strong resistance. As the weeks moved into months, I found the people quite hostile and knew that the ignorant and bigoted were undermining my work.

In spite of the resistance, I was still doing reasonably well and was probably earning more than most of the young people who were expressing their concern for my welfare. Tom put forward quite a compelling argument that presented itself as a strong temptation. My interest in a particular young lady made it all the harder. I assured him that I would give his proposition some serious thought.

As the days rolled by, it became more obvious there was a conspiracy to entice me to give up colporteuring and look for a suitable job in Ararat. The young people went out of their way to be friendly. They made a fuss of me and encouraged my friendship with the young lady, whose company I was enjoying more and more. I

was in a very vulnerable situation and I knew that the Angels were keeping a close eye on me.

It was all getting a bit stifling, when the Lord stepped in. I received an invitation from the Publishing people to attend a colporteur's convention at Warburton. It would last for six days, commencing on a Friday night and closing on the following Wednesday. The Lord was opening up a way of escape and a chance to re-think my priorities. Some time away with fellow colporteurs in a spiritual environment would be most therapeutic.

The convention was a great experience with practical instruction and inspirational encouragement. I was starving for Christian fellowship and spiritual enlightenment. The whole package proved a great blessing. It put me back on track and reminded me of who I was and where I was going. It probably saved me from falling into a trap that looked most comfortable but could have proved disastrous.

When I returned, I discovered that I had a roommate. He was about twenty-two years old, tall, blond and very handsome. He was working with a construction company and would be sharing my room until another room became vacant. We became friends straight off and I was pleased to introduce him to my friendly

milkbar group. He was also a football player. He played a variation called 'Australian Rules'! He vowed to convert me to Victoria's popular sport. This peculiar game of football is unique to Australia and probably always will be. It is a rough and nasty game that is played by tough young men who are regularly penalized for punching, elbowing, kneeing or jumping on their opponents.

My new roommate's reputation had gone before him. He was quickly invited to play for the local, Marist Brothers team. He invited me to accompany him when they played on Sundays. We went on a few bus tours but the behaviour was a bit ordinary. Then he invited me to go to a church social with him. To my lasting embarrassment, I was to discover that my idea of a church social differed dramatically from other church organizations.

We entered a huge hall with seats lining the walls. Young people were sitting and standing around chatting, laughing and dancing to the music. We moved to the edge, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. Right on time, a priest walked to the centre of the hall where he welcomed everyone and announced the first dance.

My friend was mobbed by half a dozen brightly dressed girls who took him into the crowd in the centre of the hall. The music started again, the mob sorted themselves into couples, and away they went. And there I was, the only one sitting while the dancing couples enthusiastically spun each other around. The next thing I knew, the priest was tapping me on the shoulder. He asked me who I was and why I was not taking part in the dancing. I explained that I didn't know how to dance. He then suggested that I should leave, as I would feel out-of-place. He was right. I did feel out-of-place and took the opportunity to escape.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if He were the only one for whom the Savior died. The distress of every one touches His heart. The cry for aid reaches His ear…He cares for each one as if there were not another on the face of the earth" DA p480.

Rejection was getting to me so I searched my territory map for a small country town where they would not know about me, or my work. In the far corner of my map I found a town called Glenthompson. It was possible to reach this little dot on the map by rail car. These contraptions were quite common in Victoria. They resembled a bus but ran on rails. I chose a Wednesday for my foray. One full day should do.

It certainly was a small town but it looked friendly enough. I went to the general store, as these places are a mine of information. The storekeeper informed me the most prominent person in town was also in charge of the Presbyterian Sunday School. If I was selling books that could assist teachers to teach, then he would be the person to see.

Mr. Patterson turned out to be a most hospitable gentleman. On learning the reason for my visit, he quickly invited me in. We sat on a comfortable lounge while I canvassed him with an emphasis on how the books would provide teachers with valuable background information. He was impressed. After buying a set for cash, he gave me a list of names of people who he felt sure would be interested. He agreed for me to use his name as a reference.

I only had four sets, so when they were sold, I took orders. The day's work netted me four sets sold for cash plus six orders with good deposits. A month later, when I returned to deliver the books, there were two more homes anxious to have a set. It was a good feeling to know that twelve homes in that small town possessed a set of classics on the life of Christ. The children in one Sunday School would be taught the truth about Jesus and His love.

It was time to make another delivery in an area of Ararat where the Lord had blessed my efforts. It would be a big one so I would need the help of my friendly taxi driver. I had notified my customers of the day when the books would be delivered and the taxi driver was booked in advance. We started early and kept at it for a full morning. There were very few cancellations so we

had lots of empty boxes on the back seat and a very full wallet in my pocket. He was impressed. He got carried away with his flattery until I explained that my success was due to God's blessing and the support of angels.

Taxi drivers are pretty hard-bitten types so my explanation fell on deaf ears. He didn't mock me but just shook his head. Then to my amazement, he agreed that someone must be looking after me. When I returned to my hotel room to write out my report, I merely recorded that a certain number of books had been delivered. There were a lot of fascinating events taking place, but my non-believing Taxi-driver was my biggest fan as I worked hard in Ararat.

A few days later, as I was riding past the taxi rank, my friend called me over. He explained that he had been thinking about me and my success, as a salesman. He knew of some companies who were looking for young guys who had a flare for selling. He knew that my time in Ararat would soon be over and expressed his hope that I would settle down in his town and make it my town. I was close to shedding a tear as he went on to share his feelings. His experiences with me had made a deep impression on him. So much so that he hoped we could form a friendship.

That night, I thanked God for the blessings of the Colporteur's Convention that had helped me to re-assess my goals. I was determined that no thing or person would cause me to be distracted from my aim to return to college. It was important that I further my education. At this point in my life, I had no idea what the Lord had in mind for me but I was convinced that I would need a better education than the one I had. Without the Lord's intervention, I could have very easily crumbled under the pressure of the milkbar group and the taxi driver's kind words. It would be hard to leave the town where I had spent four of the coldest months of my life. This was a town where I had made some wonderful friends and one in particular who would be upset at my departure. But leave I must.

The publishing people were shocked to learn that I needed a new territory. They suggested that I go around and make sure that I hadn't overlooked some sections of the town. How about the country? Had I faithfully canvassed every little town, the farms and all the sheep stations? In reply, I asked them what they thought I had been doing over the past four months! I reminded them of all the books they had sent and were delivered.

Their records showed that the last colporteur had taken over twelve months to cover the territory of

Ararat. He had been selling medical books, and I wondered how he had canvassed the area my taxi driver had taken me. Finally, they agreed to give me a new territory. The map would be sent with my next order. I would have to find my own accommodation and make the new area last to the end of the year. There was no hint as to where it would be.

My visits to the milkbar became less frequent as I tried to extricate myself from the friends that were making my departure so painful. I hadn't told them I was going for two reasons. One was my reluctance to face the reaction and the other was that I didn't know where I was going. I expected them to give up on me and write me off as a hopeless case.

Eventually, the expected letter arrived with a map of my new territory. They were sending me to St Arnaud, another country town with no Adventists. It was another challenge. It seemed as though I was being tested, but I wasn't going to succumb or lose my way. Another three months of loneliness would not stand in my way. I was determined to succeed.

The milkbar set didn't react quite as I expected. They were sorry to see me go but wished me all the best in everything as I worked my way back to college. There

were no negative comments, just some expressions of regret that I was leaving town and would no longer be part of their group. It was a difficult time as I had become quite attached to these sparkling, young achievers. It was even harder to end a budding romance that had good prospects but too many walls standing in the way. It was one of the saddest evenings of my life.

As soon as another delivery was completed and another sad farewell endured, I thanked my taxi friend for all his support, encouragement and friendship. When I sat down and studied my new territory I found a lot of countryside with a number of small towns. It was up in the northeast, bordering my old territory of Stawell. I couldn't see how the area would keep me busy for three months. There would have to be another friendly taxi driver as the farming district looked too scattered for a pushbike. However, if this was where the Lord wanted me to work, He would no doubt reveal His plan as I moved forward.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"All who have chosen God's service are to rest in His care. Christ pointed to the birds flying in the heavens, to the flowers of the field and bade His hearers consider these objects of God's creation" DA p313.

The Station Master kindly allowed me to leave my gear in his protective care while I explored the town.

My first objective was to locate suitable accommodation. In 1951, St Arnaud was a sleepy little town with a definitely rural atmosphere. There were broad-hat country gents walking about or standing around in groups discussing the latest wool prices. It was easy to imagine the wheat shoots growing out of their trouser cuffs. Most wore tan riding boots and Fletcher Jones trousers.

The ladies must have stayed at home or were meeting at the Country Women's Association Hall. It seemed like a very blokie sort of town with a lot of noise coming from the many hotels lining both sides of the street. It

wasn't easy to get the publican's ear, with the crush around the bar. Eventually, I discovered that none of the hotels took in boarders.

The numerous hotels were a feature of what was a prosperous mining town back in the early eighteen-hundreds. The name of the town was explained on a plaque in the centre of the city park. St Arnaud was named after a French marshal, Jacques Leroy de Saint Arnaud, Commander-in-chief of the army of the East during the Crimean War. Someone who served under him must have decided he should be remembered. So many towns carried names with their roots in history; many have forgotten.

The logical source of information would be the taxi drivers. They turned out to be an interesting collection of characters. Most of them were obese, red faced, surly types who had little time for people who were not potential customers. Finally it was revealed that there was only one boarding house in the town and it was usually full.

The establishment was on the edge of town, up a gravel road, on the side of a steep hill. It was an old weatherboard house, in need of urgent repair. The iron roof was rusty and paint was peeling off the fascia

boards and window frames. Instead of lawn, there were a few clumps of grass interspersed with anthills. These housed the red, easily upset little beasts, whose bite stings for hours. Most of the verandah was covered in, leaving a narrow entrance to the front door.

My knock caused some movement and a gruff female voice, behind the screen door, demanded to know what I wanted. I explained my need for full board over the next few weeks. At this, the lady opened the screen door in order to have a closer look at me. While she was summing me up, I was also giving her the once over with a sense of *de ja vous*. Here was another one of those old timers from whom I had escaped back in Stawell and Ararat.

Frizzy, rebellious hairs escaped from her bun. The well-worn dress hid a frail frame that suggested she had endured a hard life. Her wrinkled face showed no emotion as she stared at me with unblinking eyes. She had one brown sock rolled up to her knee while its companion had fallen to her ankle.

In her low, husky voice, she announced there was one bed in a shared room. There was no midday meal provided except on Sunday. I would have to share the one bathroom with six other men, but if I could wait, I

would have the facilities all to myself as the other men left early. The price was right, so I rode back to the station to collect my belongings, with the assistance of a local taxi.

The landlady allowed me to store my books under the house in a storage room she kept locked. There was plenty of room for my bike too. In fact, there was more room under the house than there was upstairs. The rooms were very small with one wardrobe for two boarders, a small dresser and a lowboy next to each bed for personal things. There was no chair so the saggy bed was my resting place. The only thing missing was a cat.

The arrival of the inmates was most entertaining. There were shearers, labourers, roustabouts and a construction worker. They were noisy, uncouth and all trying to outdo each other telling wild stories about their day's adventures. My roommate was a shearer. He couldn't wait for dinner to be served so that he could head for his favourite hotel. The language would take some getting used to. It took me back to my horse riding days.

In response to the landlady's call, there was a stampede as the men rushed from their respective rooms to sit

themselves around the table. When I was introduced, they made wise cracks about Errol Flynn. They dived into his murky past and dwelt on the most sordid aspects of his history. The conversation soon turned to their favourite subject, beer. They were literally scoffing down their meal as quickly as possible, so they could get off to the pub.

I was halfway through my braised steak and onions, when the thirsty group scrambled onto the back of a truck, already moving down the road. It was a relief not to be invited to accompany them on their night's activity. After the jelly and custard desert, I escaped to my room to enjoy the peace and quiet that I knew would not last. In those days, hotels closed at ten o'clock, so soon after that magic hour, the house would be full of noise.

My sleep was shattered by the racket created by six drunks, stumbling over each other and items of furniture. My roommate crashed onto his bed with a thud and was soon snoring at a window-rattling volume. He was fully dressed, shoes and all. This would take some getting used to. It was nearly midnight when the house went quiet but it was hard to sleep with the out-of-tune choir, vibrating, changing key and fluctuating in volume. These men had snoring down to a fine art.

As I prayed for sleep, I wondered how long I could endure these impossible conditions. Everything was foreign to me. It was a way of life that I knew existed but had never been a part of. It would be necessary to locate something a little more civilized if I was to survive this town. I was already feeling very much alone. How I longed for the companionship of the milkbar set.

The next morning was chaos. The moaning and groaning, was mixed with noises of lungs being cleared, water being splashed over whiskery faces, loud shouting as men tried to wake up their sleepy mates, and heavy boots stomping around the wooden floor. This wasn't hell, but it was surely half way there. I kept out of their way, hoping they would all leave at the same time. They did, so I had a peaceful breakfast.

It was time to explore the town. I soon discovered that like all towns, St Arnaud had a poor area in the older part of town. There was a newer, more modern area that looked quite promising. There appeared to be a lot of children in both areas so I was encouraged. There was also another section of town with older, larger homes that represented the wealthier more established population. No doubt housing many retired pastoralists.

A few days into my work, it became obvious that this place was going to be a fruitful exercise. The people were friendly and interested in Christian values. Most of the children were attending Sunday School so it was easy to persuade their mothers to provide good books for them at home. I encouraged them to do their part to supplement what their children were learning at Sunday School. Unlike Ararat, the news quickly spread as satisfied customers shared with their neighbours and friends. It was common for a smiling mother to invite me in, get me a drink and sit on the lounge with an expectant look on her face. Selling had never been so easy.

I got to like the little town but my living conditions were getting me down. Snoring, smelly socks, foul language and poor quality food, made the place a nightmare. Added to that was my on-going boredom with Sabbaths. My spiritual experience was suffering as the boarding house was no suitable environment for prayer, Bible study or worship. On Sabbath, I rode around on my bike, exploring country roads, reading in the park and watching families enjoying picnics.

One Sabbath, I had an experience that gave me quite a shock. I was riding through the centre of town on my way to the park when I noticed two young guys walking

in the direction of the local picture theatre. My curiosity got the better of me so I pulled up opposite them to say hello. It was then that I recognized them. They were both college students I knew from the year before. They were amazed to see me and stopped to chat. They were working on a large sheep station quite a way out of town. Their employers were in town for a sheep sale so they were free to wander around and amuse themselves. They invited me to accompany them to the pictures, as there was a famous film on show.

As a lad, my parents took me to the picture theatre every Saturday night. As we walked the three miles home, we discussed the film, the actors and the plot, if there was one. Back in the forties, going to the pictures was a big deal. It was a break from the mundane, working week and the struggles to survive. But, when I went to college, life took on a new meaning. A college week of prayer changed my life. It was then that I surrendered my all to Jesus. After my baptism, I made a lot of decisions. One was to give up attending movies. On lonely evenings I had often been tempted but had resisted the urge.

Now I was being tempted to not only break the Sabbath, but to accompany two friends from college days who wanted me to go with them to see this

blockbuster. This was a decisive moment as I was as lonely as could be and excited at seeing young people with whom I had so much in common. However, the more they encouraged me, the more I felt dismayed at the situation. It was against everything I stood for. I felt a lump in my stomach as we said farewell and went our separate ways.

Lunchtime was now my main meal as the meals at the boarding house were of such poor quality that I was feeling under-nourished. I made friends with a girl who served behind the sandwich bar at a local delicatessen. She got to know my preferences and turned out the best salad sandwiches I had ever eaten. Her curried egg and lettuce efforts were pretty good too. So, with a paper bag of goodies from the deli plus a sample or two from the cake shop, I headed for the park each day for an hour of nutrition and relaxation.

Every morning after the chaos subsided, I took over the bathroom, and then sat at the empty table for my breakfast. It never varied. There was always two Weetbix, floating in weak powdered milk, a slice of well- toasted white bread with marmalade jam and occasionally a piece of fruit. After breakfast, I had peace and quiet for my devotions and time to prepare for another day on the doors. It was always a relief to get

outside for some deep breathing, as the house smelt of stale tobacco, empty beer bottles and sweaty clothes.

The time had come when I could no longer endure the living conditions. I hadn't had a decent night's sleep since my arrival. On their return from their nightly pub-crawl, the intoxicated boarders banged and stumbled around for over an hour before collapsing into or onto their beds. And then there was the snoring. Maybe if they were capable of snoring in tune, it would have helped. When they finally fell asleep in a drunken stupor, I fell asleep from exhaustion.

At the end of the first month, I was desperate. I had been asking around as I went from door to door but there was not another place that took in boarders. I had located one hotel with rooms for rent, but the price was way out of my range. I had been making the problem a matter of prayer but decided to ask God to prove His promises by doing something special. Over the last weekend of my first month in St Arnaud, I kept bringing my petition to God with the specific request that He come to my rescue that very week. It would be interesting to see what He would come up with.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"When we come to Him in faith, every petition enters the heart of God. When we have asked for His blessing, we should believe that we receive it, and thank Him that we have received it. Then we are to go about our duties assured that the blessing will be realized when we need it most"
DA p200.

I decided if I was to look for decent accommodation, it might as well be in the better part of town. There was a section of new houses that I was leaving for a time when my canvassing hit a rough patch and I needed a boost. There were a lot of young marrieds in the area as nearly every house had 'colporteur flags' flying from the clothesline. Maybe a young couple might like to take in a boarder to help pay their mortgage.

It was Wednesday before my prayers were answered. I called on a new, well-kept house with newly established gardens. It smelt new and had an inviting look about it. The lady opened the door but remained behind the fly screen. All I could see was a small person who had

little to say but gave me a good hearing. I was half-way through my canvass when she asked if I was a Seventh-day Adventist. When I said yes, she invited me in. I followed her into a neatly furnished lounge room where she invited me to be seated.

I presumed that the canvass was on hold so sat in a single lounge chair with an air of expectation. The quietly spoken lady explained her mother had become an Adventist and had sent her and her husband some books written by Ellen G White. They were most impressed by the books especially one called 'The Great Controversy'. She then explained that they were Cooneyites and had been for some years.

Two iterant apostles, who had called on their home when they lived in the country, had converted them. They had invited the men to stay for a few days during which time they agreed to become followers of what is known as 'The Church of No Name'. Some call the organization, 'The Two Twos' due to their practice of reaching out in pairs. One of the founders was George Cooney, a Scott, who was a convert of the founder, William Irvine. They maintain a small group ministry, meeting in houses and depending on the generosity of their followers. They abhor musical instruments, radios, wall paintings or photographs, etc.

After filling me in on her religious background, the kind lady made me a hot Milo and asked about my religious convictions. I suggested that it might be more appropriate to share my convictions when her husband was present. She agreed and invited me to be their dinner guest on Friday night. She explained her husband worked on their sheep station during the week and only came home on weekends. They had moved to town for the convenience of their two children who were attending the local high school.

As I was leaving, the good lady asked where I was staying. This was my opportunity and I made good use of it. She was almost in tears by the time I finished describing the degradation of my accommodation. Without loitering, I bade her farewell and went on my way. It wasn't hard to imagine the conversation she would have with her husband when he arrived home on Friday. Besides, if they could accommodate two Cooneyite missionaries for a length of time, they wouldn't find me a burden.

Friday night couldn't come quick enough. For some reason the boarders were more exuberant than usual. A fight broke out between two shearers, resulting in a visit by the police. It wasn't the first time they had been called. The boarding house had an unenviable

reputation. The neighbours, while not the most ideal citizens themselves, hated the noisy place and kept their children well away for fear of contamination by the foul language.

On Friday evening a smiling husband and two friendly kids greeted me at the door. I nearly swooned at the cooking aromas as I was directed to the same comfy armchair. Mr. S was a down-to-earth type of person who made me feel right at home. We chattered about his life on their property, the hardships the farmers were suffering due to the rabbit plague and the sacrifices they had to make as a result of their move to town. I soon made friends with the kids who enjoyed my horse riding stories. Then it was time to enjoy the first vegetarian meal I had tasted for quite awhile. They were meat eaters but were interested in the reasons for going on a non-flesh diet. We also discussed some of the subjects raised in 'The Great Controversy', that they had both read. It was the most stimulating mealtime I had enjoyed for many months and the most delicious meal I had tasted for the whole year.

During the evening, we discussed many spiritual topics. It was obvious that these sincere believers were searching for further truth. 'The Great Controversy' had opened up new vistas of Bible information that

challenged their curiosity. It was during that evening I realized how limited my knowledge of Bible subjects really was. It stirred my determination to get back to college to further my education.

As I was leaving, Mr. S approached the matter of my accommodation. He and his wife had been discussing my situation and had decided to offer me their spare room. They knew that I would be out all day and that their children would be home before I returned so there would be no problem as far Mrs. S's privacy was concerned. It was all sounding very exciting when he added that there would be no cost as I would be their guest, not a boarder. Mr. S smiled as he explained that there would be a fee. I had to teach them why I was an Adventist over the weekends.

As soon as the snoring started that night, I slipped out of bed and thanked God for a wonderful answer to my prayers. It is marvellous how God always comes up with something far better than we expect. He is a wonderful God who has our best interests at heart. How often we put up with mediocrity when we could be enjoying luxury under His care.

"Through channels which we cannot
discern He is in active communication with

every part of His dominion. But it is in this speck of a world, in the souls that He gave His only-begotten Son to save, that His interest and the interest of all heaven is centred" DA p256.

Mr. S called around to the boarding house to collect my belongings in his Austen A40 utility. He lifted my bike into the back with my gear and away we went. I was never so pleased to leave a place of abode in all my life. It was an experience I never wanted to repeat. However, the adventure had given me a picture of how people live at the poor end of town.

I was soon settled in and feeling very comfortable when I was invited to accompany the family on a trip to their farm for the afternoon. The kids loved to return to the home of their childhood where there were so many happy memories.

After an hour's drive we bumped over the cattle grid and pulled up at a friendly looking old homestead. It was my kind of place, with a horse looking over the gate, sheep in the yard next to the house and an old truck with long grass growing around its tires. The old corrugated iron shed looked the part, as did the shearing shed further down the yard. Some well-tended fruit trees

completed the scene, making it a place anyone could love.

Now that I had acquired five-star accommodation, I was running out of territory. There was plenty of country, but homes were scattered with long distances between each station. I would be lucky to make six visits each day and where would I stay at night? It was not a practical situation but most challenging. The Publishing people expected me to cover the territory but I just wondered how.

I shared my dilemma with Mr. S who was interested in my occupation. He looked very thoughtful, then suggested that I leave it with him to consider for a few days. He had already helped me with my first delivery. It made him excited as he observed the homes accepting the books. So far my canvassing in St Arnaud had been very successful. My percentage of sales was higher than anywhere else I worked. The people must have been sorry for a salesman who was half asleep. On two occasions, I had fallen asleep while the customer had gone to get me a drink.

Just before I canvassed the last street, Mr. S came up with a suggestion. As his shearing was over for the year and most of the urgent jobs had been attended to, he

was free to do his own thing. Most of his neighbours were preparing for their annual overseas trip or about to take another ocean cruise, while he had no plans for any expensive adventures, due to his mortgage payments on his new house. He was willing to chauffeur me around the district if I could afford to pay for the petrol.

This was another answer to prayer. The Lord was not just opening doors but providing me with the means to get to them. My new chauffeur knew most of the farmers in the area and could instruct me as we drove along. It was Ararat all over again. This time I put in a more optimistic order for more books.

While we waited for the books to arrive, I finished the town territory. There were pockets of richer housing and streets where the battlers resided. There were some red-light houses, a few run down cottages and a number of dilapidated houses where mothers with large families, struggled to survive as sole parents.

It was a challenge to approach the more disadvantaged citizens but I consoled myself with the thought that everyone needs a chance to learn of Jesus and His love. Most of these people who placed an order, managed to find a deposit. However, in some cases it was a sad

experience on delivery day when they had to admit that they had failed to save up the rest of the price of the book. I wanted to give them the books but it would set a bad precedence, so I returned their deposit with some encouraging words and prayer.

The best way to get a broad view of life is to work as a door-to-door salesman. Contacting people in their homes or on their doorstep provides an education college can't provide. When confronted by a salesman, people remove their masks and reveal their true identity. If they are nasty characters, they will be just that, but if they are warm, compassionate, personable individuals, they shine like polished silver. Working with people teaches you a lot about tact and prudence. The salesman has to get on with people, know what to say and how to say it, to succeed.

"True character is not shaped from without, and put on; it radiates from within. If we wish to direct others in the path of righteousness, the principles of righteousness must be enshrined in our hearts" DA p307.

Two days before the town of St Arnaud was completed, the boxes of books arrived. We set the next

Monday as the start of our adventure, working the sheep stations as far as my old territory of Stawell in the South, up the Sunraysia Highway as far as Donald, West to Marnoo and East along the Wimmera Highway for as far as we felt inclined.

A lot of this country would be virgin territory so we were excited at the thought of putting Christian books into homes whose libraries had never held Ellen G White's books and most likely very few religious books of any kind. This would be a wonderful climax to my year of colporteur ministry.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Good works can never purchase salvation, but they are an evidence of the faith that acts by love and purifies the soul. And though the eternal reward is not bestowed because of our merit, yet it will be in proportion to the work that has been done through the grace of Christ"
DA p314.

A bright sunny Monday welcomed us as we loaded the little Austin A40 with two boxes of books, an esky of food, and a bag each containing personal items and a tent. We weren't quite sure how far we would travel away from home so we were prepared to camp out. After prayer, we said our farewells and headed off into the unknown.

It really was the Ararat story all over again. Mr. S provided me with all the relevant information about

each potential customer, and with the Lord's help, I managed to convince an average of two out of three homes to accept a set of 'Desire of Ages'. By the end of the day we were in driving distance of the home where we knew we would receive a warm welcome.

As neither of us were keen campers, Mr. S and I kept as close to his home as we could but eventually, we had to reach further out to the edges of my territory so a few cool nights were spent shivering in our tent. But a few hardships couldn't dampen our enthusiasm as we continued to place the story of Jesus in country homes. It was quite exciting and filled us with joy as we experienced the Lord's blessing.

We found the people quite friendly and interested in our efforts to promote a greater awareness of the life of Christ and what His story means to all of us collectively and as individuals. Mr. S steered me away from people who he knew would be hostile but we still managed to strike a few objectionable people. Their rudeness was not enough to colour our appreciation for the general community.

On a number of occasions we stayed to help farmers who were struggling to get their sheep yarded fast enough to keep up with the shearers. We even did a bit

of droving and on one occasion we looked after a mob of sheep while the farmer went home for more supplies. It was a great experience being out in the open country, mixing with friendly down-to-earth people. We shared their lives, their hardships and their joys as well as their hospitality, food and in some cases, shelter.

The colporteur ministry had become my way of life. As I met up with opposition that I was incapable of dealing with, the urge to return to college was growing. The average J.W. proved more than a match, while Mormons and active Pentecostals could tie me up in knots. It was obvious I needed more education in Bible subjects. My encounters with Clergy of various denominations often proved a disaster, but in a few cases quite surprising.

One wet miserable day I was invited to relax in a kind clergyman's study. He proceeded to debate with me on the subject of the Sabbath. He did most of the talking so it was really a learning experience for me. It was like being in class although most of what he said was negative. However, it was part of my education as he shared his perspective on a subject dear to my heart. We parted good friends as we expressed our appreciation for the opportunity to share our views in a friendly manner.

The last visit from a Publishing Department Secretary set me thinking about my future. He expressed the desire of his department to offer me a position as a full-time colporteur. I managed to persuade him of my need to further my education but he wanted a firm agreement that after two or three years at college, I would return to Victoria and take up the colporteur ministry. He was disappointed over my unwillingness to commit myself to any firm plans for my future.

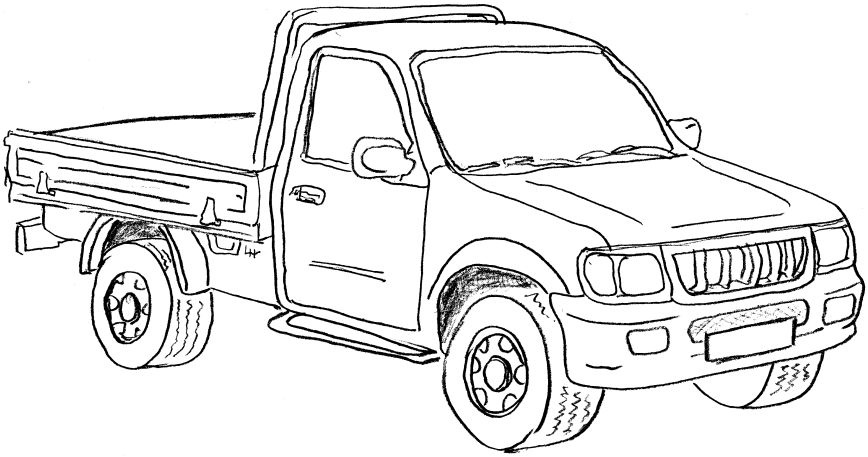
Canvassing had introduced me to the world. It had taught me how to stand on my own feet, but it also taught me, with the Lord's help and the support of angels, we can succeed in achieving more than our expectations. At the end of the 1950-1 vacation, I was broke, ashamed over my failure to earn a canvassing scholarship and uncertain of my future. Yet, here I was, eleven months later, full of confidence and looking forward to what ever the Lord had in store for me.

"There is greater encouragement for us in the least blessing we ourselves receive from God than all the accounts we can read of the faith and experience of others"
DA p348.

The 'University of Hard Knocks' had marked the

transition point in my life. I had moved from boyhood to manhood. Apart from learning that success depends on how much we depend on a loving God for all the necessities of life, we can't depend on others for our survival. I had become aware that there is no such thing as a self-made person. Either God is directing our destiny or the devil, in one disguised form or another.

The lessons learnt at St Arnaud, my last adventure for the year, would forever live in my memory. The contrast between the first half of my stay in St Arnaud and the last half was quite dramatic. I was close to discouragement when the Lord stepped in and opened up a whole new vision of what life can be like when you become involved with beautiful people.



CHAPTER TWENTY

"The humblest worker, moved by the Holy Spirit, will touch invisible chords, whose vibrations will ring to the ends of the earth, and make melody through eternal ages' DA p823.

The days flew past like traffic going in the opposite direction. We completed our territory in a matter of weeks and were soon settled back enjoying the luxury of the family home. Mr. S needed to attend to some urgent farm responsibilities while I had some call-backs to chase up. Then I would have an important delivery back in Ararat followed by a big delivery in St Arnaud. The next few days would keep us all very busy.

As our busyness eased, we found more time for Bible study. My new family was progressing very well as we went through subject after subject, marking our Bibles and discussing vital doctrinal topics. However, I felt

my inadequacy and suggested that if they felt ready to visit an Adventist church, we should head off to Maryborough the next Sabbath. I was anxious to introduce my lovely family to the pastor so that he could carry on with the studies they were keen to pursue.

With a great deal of excitement we made plans for our first worship experience in an Adventist church. We all agreed that the very next Sabbath would be our special day. As the Sabbath approached, the level of excitement increased until by Friday night, we found it hard to get to sleep.

The little utility was more than loaded as we settled the two teenagers, our carry bags and the all-important esky into the back, then squeezed ourselves into the front. We had no problems getting everyone ready on time, as we were all awake before the birds. There was a feeling of keen expectation as we set off for what we all knew was the beginning of a new start for the whole family.

The eighty kilometres to Maryborough would take well over an hour in the Austin A40 so there was plenty of time to explain the worship style followed by most Adventist churches. It would be all so new to my friends, as they were not accustomed to singing hymns or to

listening to musical instruments. In fact, they had never worshiped in a church building before.

The Cooneyites only worship in homes and follow a very simple form of worship. Each person present is encouraged to participate while the leader acts as a chairman rather than a preacher. The Bible is the centre of all discussion and each member of the group is given the opportunity to share their ideas and impressions from their favourite passage of Scripture.

We were welcomed by sounds of joyful singing as we entered the church and found our seats. It would be hard not to be moved by the rousing hymns floating about the wooden church praising the Lord of Heaven. My friends sat quietly, absorbing the atmosphere. When we separated for the lesson study, I was asked to introduce my friends who were then made to feel welcome.

It was with a great amount of excitement that I introduced the church pastor to his new interests. Pastor Sid Cole was extremely pleased to meet such a beautiful family who were keen for him to visit on a regular basis for Bible studies. He agreed to visit the next week while I was still the star boarder.

The church service was a real inspiration. We all enjoyed exploring new insights on the love of God and His saving grace. It was my first sermon for months and it reminded me how spiritually dehydrated I was. This would be a Sabbath to remember for all of us. I don't remember what happened at lunchtime, but I do remember how pleased I was with the way the church members went out of their way to befriend their visitors. It would be easy for my friends to fellowship with these people when I was out of the picture.

On our journey home, the conversation was quite different from that of the morning. My friends were ecstatic over the events of the day. They were all the more certain God was leading them. They kept praising the Lord for His providence and for directing me to their home. It was all a bit overwhelming but certainly a wonderful way to end an adventurous year.

The sadness of bidding farewell to the family with whom I had become so closely attached, was somewhat diminished by the fact that they would be well cared for by Pastor Cole. They were very impressed by this happy, friendly man of God and were looking forward to his impending visit. I knew it wouldn't be many weeks before he would have the pleasure of baptizing this fine Christian family.

The day after Pastor Cole's visit, I was driven to the train station for my trip to Melbourne. It was a teary farewell with a lot of emotions struggling for expression. We just hugged and wished each other God's richest blessings. It truly was a memorable occasion for all of us. They were commencing a new spiritual journey and I was about to begin a journey only God knew where it would lead.